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ABSTRACT

The book describes the setting, objectives, program, evaluation and achievement of six innovative action-research early childhood education projects for Aboriginal Australian children, traces various previous attempts to provide education, and provides an historical background of the estimated 140,000 Aboriginal people who make up 1% of Australia's total population. Based on the North American compensatory education model, the Bourke Project, in 1969, chose an experimental methodology and then devised an appropriate teaching program to fit the methodology. Also begun in 1969, the New South Wales van Leer Project established 12 centers, now operated by Aboriginal people, where parents provide learning experiences for themselves and their children. Functioning between 1969 and 1972, the Victorian van Leer Project developed experimental Aboriginal preschools in contrasting rural and urban settings. The South Australian van Leer Project established two preschools in 1969 to prepare children for more effective entry into the formal school setting. The Katherine Project, operating from 1970 to 1973, emphasized development of language and communicative skills by Aboriginal children in the first four primary grades. The Queensland van Leer Project, initiated in 1968 and since implemented in all Aboriginal schools throughout the state, developed a sequenced language teaching program for the first three primary grades. (NEC)

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e's Daddy
Mummy
a
a man
look at
little
a m
look at me
a boy
She is big
I can run
jumping

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Pitjantjatjara children at the Ernabella pre-school

The Early Childhood Education of Aboriginal Australians

A Review of Six Action-Research Projects

G. R. Teasdale and A. J. Whitelaw

Australian Council for Educational Research

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All photographs have been selected from files of project photographs held by the Bernard van Leer Foundation

Drawings in this book were provided by the following schools:
- Cherbourg State Primary School, Queensland
- Ernabella Community Pre-school, South Australia
- Katherine South Primary School, Northern Territory
- Marree Special Aboriginal School, South Australia
- Palm Island State Primary School, Queensland
- Project Enrichment of Childhood, Bourke, New South Wales

The authors extend warmest thanks to the children and teachers at each school for their kind assistance.

Foreword

This book is concerned with a description and an analysis of six innovative programs of early childhood education for Aboriginal Australian children. It is an important account which should be read with care – and perhaps in some cases with shame – by politicians and administrators concerned and responsible for the education of Aboriginal people as well as by professionals in this field.

The six programs began operation in the years between 1967 and 1969 in four Australian States and in the Northern Territory. As the authors point out, the time was ripe in two ways. First, there was an emerging consciousness among Australians that, as the vernacular would have it, 'Aborigines had not been given a fair go' and that major programs were necessary to attempt to redress the shameful balance. The 1967 referendum in Australia, 'by the greatest majority ever recorded', had reversed two major discriminatory clauses from the Australian Constitution. Education was seen as one way of enabling Aborigines to 'take their rightful place' – whatever that might mean – in the total Australian community.

At the same time, the great crusade for 'equality of opportunity' in the United States had produced the famous 'Head Start' program, which in the somewhat enthusiastic words of one of its principal authors: 'still stands out as one of the major social experiments of the second half of the twentieth century'. The fundamental thesis of Head Start was, and still is, that active educational intervention in the pre-school years can compensate for inadequate and ineffective home backgrounds and can promote intellectual development in such a way that children from such backgrounds are not disadvantaged in their later primary and secondary schooling.

Putting these strands together, some educators in the various Australian States pressed for experimental programs in early childhood education for Aboriginal people. There were major differences in their objectives and in the activities developed, as Dr Teasdale and Mr Whitelaw clearly show, but, with the exception of Lex Grey in New South Wales, all directors of programs accepted the deprivation-compensation hypothesis and without exception placed their faith on the education of the young child, and through the child, of parents and communities as a critical means of improving the lot of Aboriginal people.

The story of the programs is an exciting and a sobering one. It is exciting because, as can be seen even from the limited evaluative data, each of the efforts was successful in its own way. 'Placed together', Teasdale and Whitelaw claim, 'it is clear that they have played a very dominant role in shaping the direction of early childhood education provision for Aboriginal Australians since 1967'.

The story is sobering because, in the short run at least, the lessons of the programs have not been well learned, other than in the narrow context of the communities in which they operated. Despite their impressive findings, no real effort was made in any State to pick up the 'financial tab' when external funding ran out. In a sense this failure of government or other authorities to take advantage of the findings was predictable. It too, is a product of two forces. First, in Australia politicians and education administrators, with one or two honourable exceptions, have never been particularly convinced that there is a need for early childhood education. A brief flaring of interest in 1973 died quickly and provision for early childhood is still largely child minding for the poor and expensive pre-schools for the middle classes and the rich.

And secondly, despite the referendum, Aboriginal people are still low in the scale of government priorities.

Given these two strands – neglect of the pre-school child and neglect of the Aborigine, what chance was there for further development of good early childhood educational centres for Aboriginal people? The book demonstrates the need for, and the positive consequences of, good programs. It is to be hoped that the book will stimulate interest and action at all levels of responsibility.

Teasdale and Whitelaw's account has been put together with commendable patience and scholarship from what was often inadequate description and imperfect evaluative data. This is no criticism of those engaged in the original work, for they were few in numbers, concerned with the day to day development and delivery of activities, usually in the extraordinarily bad conditions which characterize the environment in which Aboriginal children are all too often forced to live. The story is told objectively, but sympathetically. It has much to say to the theorist as well as to the practitioner.

The Bernard van Leer Foundation, which provided the basic funding for four of the programs, is pleased to be associated with the production of the book. Its thanks are due to the Australian Council for Educational Research, which, not for the first time, has seen the social importance of the wide dissemination of information about innovative educational procedures for disadvantaged people in Australia.

13 May 1981
Hugh Philp

Consultant for Asia and Oceania
Bernard van Leer Foundation

Preface

During the past fifteen years there has been a rapid upsurge of interest around the world in the early education of children from under-privileged and minority backgrounds. Within Australia this trend has been particularly evident in the expansion of early childhood services for people of Aboriginal descent. The main impetus for change came during the late 1960s. It was becoming increasingly clear to educationists that Aboriginal children were not succeeding in the centralized, white-oriented systems of education in Australia. A new approach was needed, and the field of early education seemed to offer the greatest opportunity for achieving an overall improvement. Several groups of educators around the country therefore initiated action-research projects in an attempt to develop more effective early childhood programs for Aboriginal Australians. It was expected that these programs would help to overcome some of the initial educational disadvantages encountered by Aboriginal children, thus paving the way for higher levels of school achievement.

In reviewing early childhood provisions in the field of Aboriginal education it has been possible to identify six major action-research projects that were initiated during the late 1960s:

The Bourke Project was started in 1969 by a group of child psychiatrists and psychologists based at the University of New South Wales. A pre-school was established for disadvantaged white and Aboriginal children in the outback New South Wales town of Bourke, and a compensatory program based on the highly structured methods of Bereiter and Engelmann (1966) was developed. The project is a continuing one, although its emphasis now has broadened to include greater community involvement and a less structured teaching program.

The New South Wales van Leer Project also commenced in 1969, and was based in the Department of Adult Education at the University of Sydney. It had the broadly-based objective of fostering Aboriginal identity via a program of individual, family and community development. This was achieved by supporting Aboriginal groups in the establishment of family education centres where parents provided learning experiences for themselves and their young children. Twelve centres were established, mainly in northern New South Wales and in the Sydney metropolitan region. White leadership of the project phased out in 1974, and all activities now are the direct responsibility of the Aboriginal people themselves.

The Victorian van Leer Project was the responsibility of staff of the Faculty of Education at Monash University, and functioned between 1969 and 1972. Experimental pre-school programs were developed for Aboriginal groups in two contrasting settings, one in the country town of Swan Hill, the other in metropolitan Melbourne. The project achieved considerable success in fostering the children's cognitive development, but did not continue after funding phased out at the end of 1972.

The South Australian van Leer Project commenced during 1969, and during the following year two pre-schools were established, one for Aborigines of the Pitjantjatjara tribe at Ernabella, the other for people of Aboriginal and Afghan descent at the isolated northern township of Marree. The project was directed by education staff of the Flinders University of South Australia, and sought to prepare children for more effective entry into the formal school setting, and to encourage active parental involvement in the pre-school program. Although the project terminated at the end of 1971 the pre-schools were taken over by other authorities and thus have been ongoing ventures.

The Katherine Project was established in 1970 by an interdepartmental committee representing the various government authorities responsible for education in the Northern Territory. It was intended as a demonstration project with special emphasis being placed on the development of language and communication skills by Aboriginal children in the first four grades of the primary school at Katherine. Extensive contact also was established with parents, and at a later stage the local pre-school became involved in project activities. The project was discontinued during 1973, but its influence continued to be felt in the Katherine school for some years thereafter.

The Queensland van Leer Project was initiated in 1968 by senior staff of the Department of Education in that State, and commenced with an extensive survey of the oral language use of young Aboriginal children. Data from this survey then were used to develop a carefully sequenced teaching program that was extensively trialled with children in the first three grades of the Aboriginal schools at Cherbourg and Palm Island. This language program now has been revised extensively, and has been implemented in all Aboriginal schools throughout the State.

The six projects outlined above undoubtedly have had a significant influence on provisions for the early childhood education of Aboriginal Australians during the past decade. It therefore is the purpose of this monograph to review each project in detail, and to assess the relative impact of each on the field of Aboriginal education. In order to undertake this task the authors have travelled extensively throughout mainland Australia, and have spoken with a wide cross-section of researchers, teachers and administrators working in the fields of Aboriginal and early childhood education. Centres visited include Canberra, Sydney, Bourke, Tingha, Melbourne, Swan Hill, Katherine, Darwin, Brisbane, Cherbourg, Townsville and Palm Island. In particular, people associated with each of the six projects were interviewed at length, and the transcripts of these interviews have proved to be an invaluable resource in the preparation of this monograph. Where direct quotes from the transcripts have been made in the text these have been acknowledged accordingly.

The authors wish to record their indebtedness to all of the people who have collaborated with them in the preparation of the monograph. Discussions invariably took place in an atmosphere of openness and co-operation, and the authors are deeply appreciative of the extensive assistance provided by each of the 60 or more people with whom discussions were held. The support and interest of staff of the Bernard van Leer Foundation also is recorded with appreciation, especially that of Professor Hugh Philp, Foundation consultant for Asia and the Pacific.

Finally, it should be noted that the monograph has been prepared for worldwide distribution through the Bernard van Leer Foundation information network. It therefore assumes no prior knowledge of the origins, history, culture and present-day lifestyle of Aborigines. As a result most Australian readers will not find it necessary to peruse the introductory material, and may prefer to begin reading from Chapter 2.

G. R. Teasdale and A. J. Whitelaw

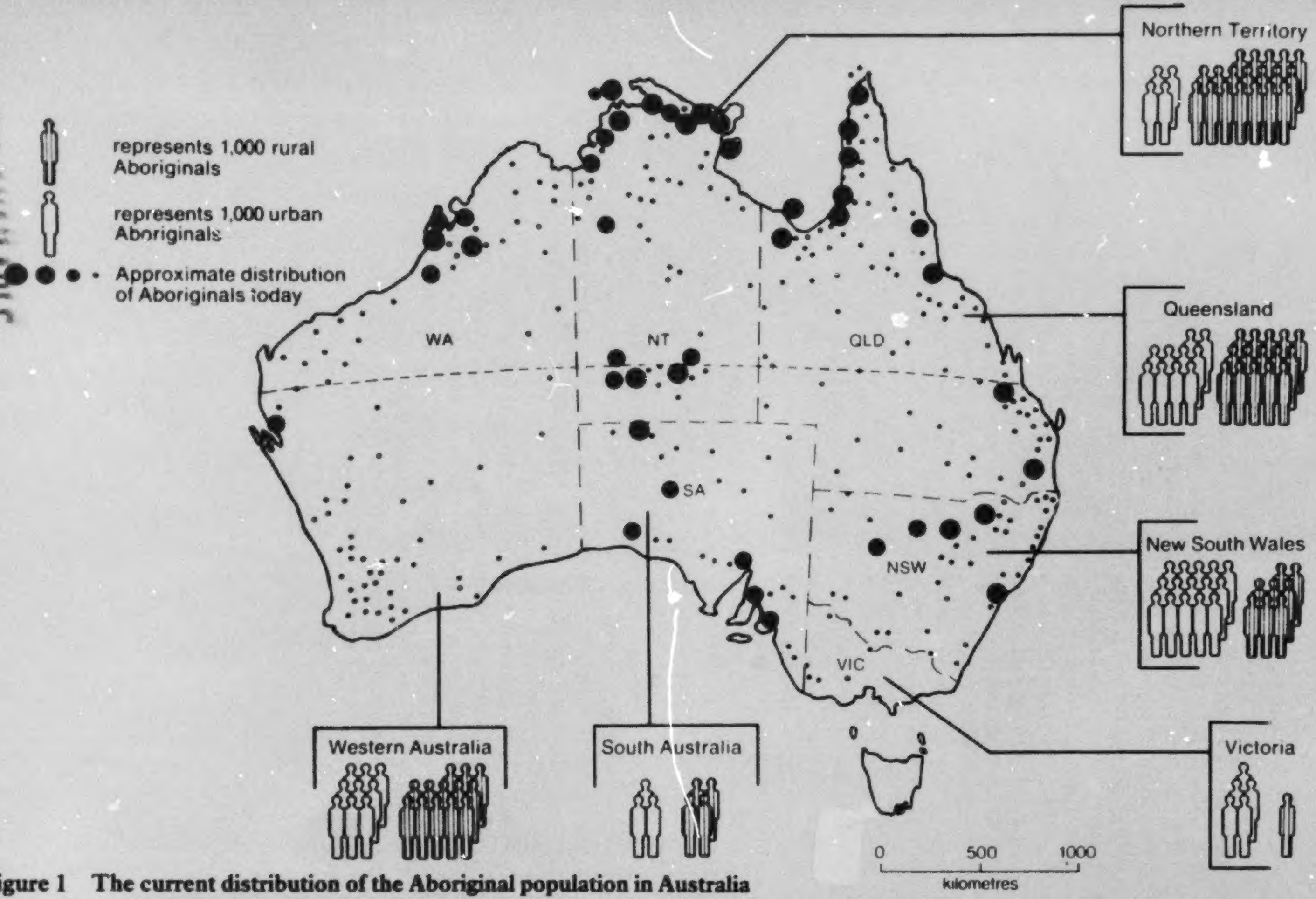
represents 1,000 rural Aboriginals
represents 1,000 urban Aboriginals
Approximate distribution of Aboriginals today
WA
NT
QLD
SA
NSW
VIC
Northern Territory
Queensland
New South Wales
Victoria
Western Australia
South Australia
0
500
1000
kilometres

Figure 1 **The current distribution of the Aboriginal population in Australia**
Source: Australian Information Service, 1976, p.20

1

Aboriginal Australians: A Historical Perspective

It is the purpose of this monograph to review recent developments in the early childhood education of Aboriginal Australians. The monograph will focus particularly on six action-research projects that have been carried out during the past decade.

Early education is defined as any form of educative activity provided for children during the first seven or eight years of life. The term Aborigine is used to describe the descendants of the original occupants of Australia, following the definition generally accepted for legal and administrative purposes by the Australian government:

> An Aborigine is a person of Aboriginal descent who identifies as an Aborigine and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives. (Adapted from Australian Information Service, 1976: 1)

Census data based on the above definition indicate that an estimated 140 000 Aboriginal people live in Australia today. They therefore comprise approximately 1 per cent of the total population of the country. Their distribution is shown in Figure 1. To fully appreciate the current status of Aborigines in Australian society it is necessary to understand something of their historical background, and to know a little about the land that was theirs alone prior to its occupation by Europeans in 1788.

Australia – The Land

Because of its isolation and uniqueness, Bechervaise (1967) has described Australia as a 'world of difference'. Although its presence probably was known to Europeans as early as the eleventh century, the country was regarded as uninhabitable because of its low, flat and dry coastline, together with its lack of spices and other commodities sought by the early traders. This was not surprising, for two-thirds of its area comprises plateau averaging between 300 and 600 metres above sea level, and only 7 per cent of the continent exceeds 600 metres in elevation. It is the most arid continent in the world, with over half of its land mass receiving an average rainfall of less than 25 centimetres per year. As a consequence, over 20 per cent of the continent is classified as desert.

Australia has been separated from other land masses for 35 million years. Although its isolation has decreased in recent geological history, it is still the earth's most isolated continent, having only a very loose connection with Asia through a chain of islands and the Malay peninsula. The other southern hemisphere continents of Africa and South America are in excess of 8000 and 11 000 kilometres respectively from Australia's shores, thus leaving Antarctica as its nearest continental neighbour. Blainey (1966) aptly concludes that as mountains characterize Switzerland, so distance is characteristic of Australia.

Because of its isolation from other land masses Australia has been deprived of their flora and fauna. Hence a range of animal and plant species has developed that varies considerably from those of other continents. There were no animals that could be domesticated such as the sheep, goat, horse or cow, nor were there any plants that were suitable for cultivation for their seeds and fruits. In relation to other continents, then, Australia seemed to be truly uninhabitable to early European visitors. Even Captain James Cook, who saw the more fertile east coast, wrote:

> But the Country itself so far as we know doth not produce any one thing that can become an article in trade to invite Europeans to fix a settlement upon it. However this Eastern Side is not that barren and miserable country that Dampier and others have described the Western Side to be. (Cited in Bechervaise, 1967: 13)

Nevertheless, Cook recognized that Australia could be made habitable to Europeans if, and only if, the required plants and animals were introduced. He was right. Quite remarkable changes have taken place during the eight or nine generations of European occupation. Australia has been transformed, large tracts of land have been cleared for cultivation and grazing, and even the desert areas are being changed by extensive mining operations. But while the new Australia is still developing at a rapid pace, the old Australia is just as quickly disappearing, much of the charm and uniqueness of the early flora and fauna having been lost for ever. And in the same way the life style of the Aborigines has been devastated by European occupation of their land, and can never be the same again.

The First Australians

Details of the first human habitation of Australia are obscure. Questions of how the Aborigines arrived, why they came, and from whence they originated, are still a matter of conjecture. In view of the isolation of Australia from other land masses it is most likely that groups travelled down over a span of perhaps 65 000 years via the chain of islands that links the continent with South-East Asia. Such an explanation is quite feasible, for during the Pleistocene period the sea was 150 to 180 metres below its present level and the Australian land mass was far more extensive than now, especially in the northern regions where it incorporated the island of New Guinea.

Blainey (1975) points out that there are scores of different routes which the Aborigines could have used when coming from the north, and that the first crossings might have been the accidental outcomes of hunting expeditions. No matter which way they came, sea crossings had to be made either by swimming or using fragile canoes, and the men must have been accompanied by some women. The crossings could have taken place over a long period of time, but in view of the rising of the sea level it is unlikely that any groups of Aborigines arrived later than 3600 years ago. It is still possible that another longer migration route will be established.

Regardless of how they came, it is likely that they were the first people to travel across the sea on voyages of migration. Blainey (1975: iii), for example, asserts that:

> Long before the rise of Babylon and Athens, the early [illegible]stralians had impressive achievements. They were the only people in the [illegible]d's history to sail across the seas and discover an inhabitable continent.

Current anthropological evidence has confirmed the presence of Aborigines in Australia for over 40 000 years, although it now appears likely that excavations in North Queensland will reveal human habitation of the continent for double this period of time. Once Aborigines had become established on the mainland it is unlikely that the occupation of the whole continent proceeded in any systematic way. The movement down the east coast could have been relatively rapid, whereas the occupation of the desert areas probably was much slower.

In the same way that one cannot establish the origins of the early Australians through their migration routes, so it is impossible to determine their origins in terms of language. During the time taken to traverse the continent even one basic language would have undergone considerable change, and the passage of time together with the relative isolation of speakers of each dialect could readily account for the presence of over 300 distinct languages by the time of European occupation. Nevertheless, researchers believe that there were two and possibly three major linguistic inroads into Australia. They have failed completely, however, to link the Aboriginal languages with any other linguistic family, although they do agree that the number and differentiation of these languages is likely to have required many thousands of years of local isolation for their indigenous development.

No help regarding Aboriginal origins is received from a study of racial affiliations, and their ancestry still remains an open question. Even now it is not known whether they constitute a single race or an amalgam of different stocks. Birdsell (cited by Blainey, 1975) has proposed a tri-hybrid racial composition involving three major migrations during the Pleistocene period, but later studies of blood group gene frequencies have not been able to confirm or deny his theory, other than to indicate that genetic heterogeneity seems likely. Because of the uncertainty of their origins in terms of racial affiliations the Aborigines have been given the separate classification of *Australoid* by physical anthropologists.

Culture Contacts Prior to 1788

It appears that from 3600 B.C. to 592 B.C. the Australian continent was completely isolated from other peoples. Between 592 and 553 B.C. small groups of Chinese visited in order to make astronomical observations, and occasional visits were made subsequently. It is certain that Arab and Portuguese sailors also visited Australia prior to the Dutch in 1606, and that the Indonesians also made some visits about the same time. The Macassans were frequent visitors to northern regions from 1600 on, and trade was in full swing in 1788 when Governor Arthur Phillip arrived on the opposite side of the continent.

Until 1788 no visitor had penetrated beyond the immediate coastal fringe, and so the basic social structure developed by the Aborigines had remained untouched. When the Europeans arrived they progressively established contact with Aboriginal groups, although this took place only slowly because of the distances involved and the inhospitable nature of much of the terrain. In fact, it was as late as the 1960s before Europeans made contact with some groups of Aborigines in the western desert region.

Aboriginal Life Styles in 1788

The population of Australia immediately prior to European settlement has been reliably estimated at 300 000. Undoubtedly the extent of the population was governed by the social laws which the Aborigines had evolved in order to live in harmony with their food supply. Considerable fluctuations in population probably occurred during earlier centuries as a result of climatic and other conditions.

The first Australians no doubt brought with them some of the tools known to mankind in the period from 40 000 to 6000 B.C. As hunters they would have brought the spear, although they subsequently invented spearthrowers and the boomerang. They were able to make tools such as the axe from stone and bone, and used these for killing, cutting and digging. Additionally, they could spin various fibres into string which they used to make nets and snares. Fragile but nevertheless serviceable canoes were handled skilfully on rivers, lakes and lagoons. Coupled with their highly developed powers of observation, they were able to use these tools to obtain their sources of food from both the land and the sea. They could make fire at will, and used it for both warmth and cooking, while their knowledge of how to obtain water in desert regions is still almost incomprehensible to Europeans.

But their food supply consisted of more than the results of the hunt. They had a wide and detailed knowledge of the edible seeds, berries, fruits and roots of plants which became their vegetable diet and sustained them when their meat supply was low or non-existent. Their knowledge of the food which the desert could yield was unlimited, and grinding stones were used to crush seed into meal. Many plants were especially prized for their healing qualities. In fact, it is only recently that Europeans have begun to recognize the Aborigines' very considerable skills with medicines and drugs.

Their whole existence depended upon travel, for by moving about the countryside in small groups, seldom greater than 50, they were able efficiently to harvest the foods throughout the seasons in widely scattered areas. Thus their housing was temporary and their worldly possessions consisted of what they could carry. They had to keep on the move as there were very few foods that could be hoarded satisfactorily in times of surplus. Although some trade of foodstuffs occurred, it generally was of limited scope.

This nomadic life of food gathering took place within carefully defined tribal areas to which they were bound closely by their religious beliefs. The Aboriginal people generally were not aggressive, and knew nothing of organized warfare. In fact, they were completely without any armament other than the spear, and the various tribal groups had no ambitions to enlarge their territories at the expense of others.

In summary, at the time of the arrival of the first Europeans Australia was peopled by a race that exploited the land in accordance with definite routines derived from the seasonal supply of food and water. They were a deeply religious people, their religion being based on the patterns and rhythms of nature. Furthermore, they were an intelligent people who had evolved a complex system of social organization and thus had learned how to maintain a delicate balance amongst themselves in a land which had been regarded as uninhabitable by others. They were completely unprepared for invasion by a people who were the products of Europe's industrial revolution.

European Colonization, 1788–1850

The British Government regarded Australia as a penal settlement and its policies were formulated accordingly. The governor was instructed to have friendly intercourse with the Aborigines and to protect them from convicts and settlers. The Aborigines were expected to live separate and segregated lives. Because of this, all missionary activity initially was discouraged.

Unfortunately the first white settlers generally were people who found it difficult to live alongside members of their own society, let alone those of another culture. Without exception, however, they considered themselves to be superior to the Aborigines, whom they regarded as being more like animals than human beings. They were totally insensitive to the demands of a culture which did not incorporate the major aspects of their own: individualism, barter, Christianity, and the English law system. Consequently they were inflexible in their attitudes to other value systems and disregarded completely the vast store of knowledge and insight that the Aborigines had acquired for their own survival.

The British Government later ruled that Aborigines were to be given the status of British subjects, thus implying a need to protect, assimilate and civilize them. This was in contradiction to their earlier policy that European settlers and Aborigines were to live separate and segregated lives. The British did not see this as a contradiction, but regarded British citizenship as a major concession to the Aborigines. The latter, however, could see no advantages in such an arrangement. There appeared to be sound reasons for their non-acceptance: what they saw concerning the operation of a penal colony did not attract them to a British way of life, and they soon realized that among the newcomers the upper and middle class systems were clearly defined. Thus all Aborigines, irrespective of tribal status, were regarded by the British as having no status higher than that of servants, and all dealings with them took place on this basis. The Aborigines were quick to note that they were not being consulted in matters concerning their welfare.

It was inevitable that the two groups should clash, and early in the nineteenth century the relationships between them were at a very low ebb. This was probably the most important period of crisis between them, as in most cases the Aborigines were being treated with arrogant superiority, often accompanied by considerable brutality. This does not mean that nothing was being done for the Aborigines – many of the difficulties were arising directly from the Europeans' complete lack of understanding of their culture and life style. In fact, in relation to the resources and needs of the colony at the time, a great deal was being attempted. Judgments therefore should not be made in terms of what was desirable, since resources were not even able to meet the needs of the new settlers.

In summary, it is understandable that as a result of human conservatism the two groups operated in terms of their own cultures, and any common ground therefore was hard to find. The British authorities were sincere in their efforts to promote the welfare of the Aborigines, but only on terms that created an impossible situation for them. The Aborigines, on the other hand, had developed a social system and a set of religious beliefs through which they could live in harmony with nature and with one another, and so could see no reason why they should forfeit their culture for the British way of life as they saw it operating in the colony. They were a proud people who wanted to be treated as equals in decision making and in their status within British society. Unfortunately the sympathetic attitudes of the British Government were not shared by the early settlers, whose progressive exploitation of tribal lands brought disruption, fragmentation and often destruction to the lives of many Aborigines. King-Boyes (1977: 99) provides an apt summary of the situation in the following terms:

> It would be difficult to find two cultures of greater contrast than the European and the traditional Aboriginal; the former exploitative and competitive, the latter conservatory and cooperative. Even without the problems posed by differences of language, technology and external appearances, it is doubtful that a meaningful dialogue could have been established between the two peoples for their aspirations were diametrically opposed. The philosophic concepts basic to traditional Aboriginal life would have been beyond the comprehension of most of the Europeans with whom the Aborigines made initial settlement contact.

Major Developments 1850–1967

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the various States assumed responsibility for Aboriginal welfare, and the earlier determination to regard Aborigines as full British subjects gave way to a series of protective provisions. This was a grim period for the Aborigines whose population had fallen from 300 000 to an estimated 75 000 within 100 years of the European occupation of their land. Some of the major factors underlying this tragic decline have been summarized thus:

> The occupation of tribal lands by settlers forced the invaded tribe to encroach permanently upon lands of neighbouring tribes and divorced them from their sacred areas. Their cyclic life pattern disrupted, the education of the young was disturbed and important ceremonies either suspended or reduced in number, thus reducing the development of future tribal elders.
>
> The wanton killing and maiming of men and the abduction of women for prostitution and slavery resulted in disruption of family life. The effects of this were accelerated by the abduction of small Aboriginal children by settlers and the frequent practice of abandoning them at adolescence.
>
> The introduction of European diseases and alcohol further contributed to fragmentation of Aboriginal society and helped to promote the apathetic attitudes erroneously attributed by the Europeans to inferior intellectual capacity. (King-Boyes, 1977: 109)

Between 1860 and 1911 each of the state authorities enacted legislation that placed Aboriginal people under the guardianship of official protectors. Restrictions were imposed upon their movement from place to place, alcohol was prohibited, employment was regulated, property was managed, and even marriage between Aborigines and other races often was controlled. The latter, of course, did not prevent an increasing tendency for loose (and often forced) liaisons between European males and Aboriginal women that resulted in a rapid increase in the numbers of people of mixed descent. Since the offspring from these liaisons invariably were cared for by the women, they continued to be indentified as Aborigines rather than members of the white population.

Federation was achieved in 1901 without the States losing their responsibilities as guardians of the Aborigines, and control measures gradually were increased during the subsequent four decades. Segregation and protection thus remained the goals of successive state governments. During this period the Aboriginal population continued to decline, and they generally were considered to be a dying race that eventually would disappear. Welfare provisions were barely adequate:

> Basic rations, articles of clothing and blankets, were issued at an increasing number of ration depots and segregated institutions. Often police officers were required to enforce the policy on Aborigines not resident at government settlements and denominational missions.
>
> The policies affected primarily the declining number of Aborigines and the increasing number of part-Aborigines living in farming and pastoral areas. Towards the end of the nineteenth century reserves and institutions were also established in more distant regions. To an extent these served to shield some communities from the drastic changes which had occurred elsewhere. Where efforts were made to form settled communities providing employment, health services and schooling, mission bodies were usually involved. At the outset governments did little more than provide minimal subsidies.
>
> By the 1920s most Aborigines were effectively separated from the life of the

> wider community. Poverty prevailed. Formal education at community (i.e., white) standards was within the reach of only a handful . . . Increasingly part-Aboriginal children were taken from Aboriginal surroundings and placed in institutions. (Australian Information Service, 1972: 5)

By the 1950s the Aboriginal population not only had begun to increase, but also had started to move into urban areas, and in the five-year period between 1961 and 1966 the Aboriginal population in the state capitals doubled.

Consequently a larger proportion of whites were coming into closer contact with Aborigines, and increasingly more positive and humanitarian steps were being taken in relation to their welfare. Following consultation between state and federal authorities in 1951 a policy of assimilation was formulated, the basic premise being one of equal treatment of the Aborigines and their progressive merging into the dominant European culture. Although the policy was proposed in good faith, its failure was inevitable because it had not evolved as a result of discussion and negotiation with the Aboriginal people, nor did it recognize the integrity and worth of their culture. Resistance to the policy eventually became so strong that it was replaced by a policy of integration through which the two races would live side by side, and supposedly would be able to enjoy equal opportunities while at the same time retaining as much of their own culture, language and tradition as they wished.

Despite increased effort and expenditure during the 1960s, the results generally were disappointing. The gap separating the two cultures seemed to be widening, and most Aborigines continued to live under very depressed economic conditions. Too many whites still regarded them as inferior and hence suited only for the lowest paid jobs in society. In examining the Aboriginal situation during this period it is possible to distinguish four overlapping types of Aboriginal community which had evolved from the earlier confrontations between the two races:

(i) Groups of Aborigines living on large, isolated reserves on tribal lands, and retaining to a considerable degree their traditional culture and language.

(ii) The detribalized residents of smaller reserves which had been established in rural areas of most Australian States. As noted by McConnochie (1973), their way of life generally had undergone a greater change than in the tribal reserves, and in many cases had become less cohesive and stable.

(iii) Fringe-dwelling groups who lived on the outskirts of country towns and cities, generally in very depressed circumstances.

(iv) City dwelling Aborigines who generally occupied low standard housing in working class areas.

The year 1967 proved to be something of a watershed for the Aboriginal people. During a national referendum the Australian electorate, by the greatest majority ever recorded, voted in favour of removing two specific clauses from the constitution that discriminated against Aborigines. As a direct consequence, the federal government was able to share responsibility for Aboriginal affairs with the States, and to include the Aboriginal population in official census figures. The referendum thus opened the way for more effective collaboration between the various authorities, and heralded the beginnings of a new era when the Aboriginal people themselves would become more actively involved in policy formulation and decision making.

So far, nothing has been said about the role of education in the history of contact between the two races. The following chapter begins with a brief account of the development of the school system for Aboriginal children, thus providing a historical backdrop to the subsequent examination of recent developments in early childhood education.

2

Educational Provisions for Aboriginal Australians

Aboriginal Education: A Brief History

Prior to the European occupation of Australia, the Aboriginal people possessed a complex and rational system for the education of their young. McConnochie (1973: 111) has described it in the following way:

> As with all societies, there was both a formal and an informal education system. The informal system was based on the close social life of the group. Children watched how their parents behaved, imitated them, were instructed by them, and learned from them . . . In this manner, many of the functional mores of the group and many of the day-to-day skills were learned.
>
> However, there was also a formal instructional system. This was most formalised in the initiation of young people into the ceremonial and mythological aspects of tribal life; the "rites of passage". The teaching of songs and dances, male and female initiation ceremonies, and the introduction of boys into the sacred life of the tribe, were all occasions of extreme formality and seriousness. Many of the more specific social and economic skills, such as hunting, manufacturing weapons, and learning the social commitments towards members of the tribe also were taught in this formal situation.

Largely insensitive to the traditional forms of training within Aboriginal society, the Europeans made varying attempts following their arrival in 1788 to provide schooling for Aboriginal children. Despite the unselfishness and benevolence of their motives, the Europeans simply did not appreciate or understand the Aboriginal culture, and so their efforts were almost totally unsuccessful. Approaches to the education of Aborigines during the early decades of European settlement fall into four broad categories.

Attempts to Educate the Individual

Arebano and Bennelong are two of the best known of the Aborigines who were captured and given special treatment in an effort to persuade Aborigines generally that it would be to their advantage to accept the British way of life. They were taken into the household of the first governor, Arthur Phillip, who hoped to win their trust, civilize them, and then make them 'ambassadors to their people' (Barnard, 1962: 52). Initially the captured men co-operated and the scheme appeared to be succeeding. The attempts to convert the masses by the conversion of individuals eventually was a complete failure, however, for the British were not prepared to accept the Aborigines as equals either socially or vocationally, and the Aboriginal people rejected as traitors those individuals who associated with the whites in this way.

Acceptance of Aboriginal Children into White Families

In their efforts to help Aboriginal children, some whites accepted them into their families, and were very pleased with the initial success of this approach. The idea was doomed to failure, however, for the white population could only visualize the Aborigines in the role of menial labourers, and so oriented all their training accordingly. In some instances they pampered them in their homes and then returned them to the tribe when they left Australia.

Formal Government Schooling

The first 'Native Institution' was established in 1814 by Lachlan Macquarie, governor of the colony at that time. He wrote of the venture in the following terms:

> I have determined to make an experiment towards the civilization of these natives . . . As a preliminary measure I intend to establish an institution at Parramatta, first on a small scale under the direction of a Mr William Shelly . . ., whom I shall appoint as Superintendent for Educating, and bringing up to habits of industry and decency the youths of both sexes, commencing at the outset with six boys and six girls. (Cited by Woolmington, 1973: 22)

Macquarie's experiment achieved some success, and similar institutions were established during the ensuing two decades. Their basic orientation was the preparation of Aboriginal children for a servant role, special emphasis being given to domestic skills and needlework for the girls, and to agriculture and carpentry for the boys. On completion of their schooling, however, most children reverted to the life style of their 'uneducated' peers, and by the 1840s the white settlers generally regarded their efforts to educate Aborigines as discouraging, if not completely fruitless.

Missionary Activity

Church missions were permitted to work amongst the Aboriginal people from early in the nineteenth century. With few exceptions the missionaries were convinced that the Aborigines only could progress if given an education based on the Christian religion. They appeared totally unaware of the fact that the Aborigines themselves were a deeply religious people, and that they held spiritual values that were part of the very fabric of their social and economic life. Despite their sincerity and dedication, therefore, the missionaries likewise achieved only very limited success in their attempts to educate Aborigines for roles as servants and unskilled tradesmen.

In summary, then, the first white settlers were almost completely unsuccessful in their efforts to educate the Aborigines, despite sincere attempts by well-meaning missionaries, administrators and prominent citizens. The failure of the whites lay in their totally ethnocentric attitudes. The worldwide process of European colonization at this time was based upon the presupposition of white superiority, and this was reflected in every facet of their relationships with the Aboriginal people. The white settlers had no real appreciation of the complex social, religious and cultural life of the Aborigines, and it was inconceivable to them that any Aborigine could belong other than in the servant class. All attempts at schooling therefore were based on preparing Aborigines for low status positions in European society.

In spite of the early failures and disillusionment, white missionaries, administrators and philanthropists continued in their attempts to educate Aboriginal children. Nevertheless, the history of Aboriginal education during the latter half of the nineteenth century remained one of frustration and disappointment. The development of the school system for Aborigines paralleled that of Aboriginal welfare in general (see previous chapter). Little provision was made by the States for children living under tribal conditions until the beginning of the twentieth century. The main work was carried out by dedicated missionaries anxious to civilize and protect the Aboriginal population. Education was closely allied to the teaching of their doctrines, reading in particular being necessary for the study of the *Bible*. Aboriginal Protection Boards, established late in the nineteenth century, did attempt to prepare Aborigines for life on the reserves by giving them a very rudimentary type of education in which a great deal of emphasis was placed on manual training. Funding was very limited, however, and on some reserves the teaching was carried out by reserve managers who had neither training nor experience as teachers.

As part of the policy of protection and segregation which was still operating in the early decades of the twentieth century, the tribal children were discouraged and even debarred from attending public schools with white children. In the following years the situation gradually improved, and as policies of assimilation and welfare came into vogue so there was increasing emphasis on providing Aboriginal children with the same standard of education as whites. By the early 1960s the education departments in all States had agreed to accept responsibility for the education of children on church missions and reserves if asked to do so. By 1967, with the exception of only a few schools, the departments were responsible for the education of all Aborigines at primary and secondary levels, thus bringing to a close over a century of missionary dominated endeavour in the field of Aboriginal education. Despite their sincerity, commitment and perseverance, however, the missions had achieved relatively little of real educational value. Inadequate buildings and equipment, the widespread use of untrained teachers, and severe financial constraints, seem to have been the major causes of this slow progress, together with the continuing ethnocentric attitudes and European-oriented syllabuses that dominated most of the schooling that was provided.

By 1967 the field of Aboriginal education was still a relative backwater. Despite genuine attempts to upgrade the quality of schooling, progress did not match that which had taken place in the education of white children. If anything, the gap between the two groups had widened. For classroom teachers there was little status in being appointed to an Aboriginal school, and there were no opportunities for career advancement in the field of Aboriginal education. Consequently teachers thought in terms of the policies and approaches of the schools in which their futures lay, and gave little thought to methods of improving the education of their Aboriginal pupils.

Basically, however, the problem lay in the nature of the schooling provided. The systems of education in each State were strongly centralized, and had been devised to meet the needs of the majority culture. School curricula therefore were based largely on white middle class values and standards, and relatively little was being done to adapt them to meet the special needs of Aboriginal children. In this sense the system had remained unchanged for 150 years: education was still being imposed on the Aborigines by a dominant European society. In many places parents were sending their children to school only because they had a legal obligation to do so. Irregular school attendance was endemic; consequently Aboriginal children made little progress and vocational opportunities continued to be severely restricted.

Consultation between teachers and Aboriginal parents was almost non-existent; very few Aboriginal adults were involved in the schooling process (and then only as aides, cleaners, gardeners, etc.); and aspects of Aboriginal language and culture did not occupy a central place in the curriculum of most schools. Facilities had not yet evolved whereby white teachers could be trained to develop Aboriginal children within the context of their own experiential and cultural background. It was natural, then, that parents should display either hostility or indifference, for the schools appeared to be interfering with their life styles and values, if not openly depreciating them.

Pre-School Education

The situation with regard to curriculum and teaching techniques was not very different at the pre-school level. Overall, relatively little attention was being given to pre-schooling for Aborigines, and where provisions did exist they generally reflected white middle class values and approaches, the teachers often were untrained, and financial resources were limited. In most States the education departments had not assumed direct responsibility at the pre-school level, either for Aborigines or for whites. Government subsidies were available for pre-schools, but establishment and maintenance relied heavily upon parental and community interest, with the result that a disproportionate number of pre-schools were located in the more affluent residential areas of Australian cities, and thus catered almost exclusively for upper middle class white children.

In the Northern Territory the federal government provided substantial support for Aboriginal pre-schools as early as 1959, and by 1961 four centres had been established on government settlements. Gilbert (1962: 12–13) has described their aims in the following way:

> Pre-school education on government settlements must be seen as part of this total programme of social change (to promote the advancement of Aborigines towards life in and with the rest of Australian community); whilst the same broad principles apply as with normal pre-school centres, of necessity there must be some variation in the implementation of the programme for Aboriginal children.
>
> Because of the stage of development of many Aborigines on settlements in the Northern Territory, time and emphasis must be given to the development of acceptable hygiene and eating habits, oral English, and acceptance of and in the group . . .
>
> It is now recognised that an effective tool in achieving the aim of assimilation is the training from an early age of the Aboriginal children in our social patterns . . . We feel we must continue to support the tribal family unit and not remove the child from its influence, though the Aboriginal family unit must undergo some radical changes before it can function in an analogous way to the norm of the family unit in our culture.

Despite the very narrow and ethnocentric focus of these aims by today's standards, the above statement clearly reflects the basic philosophies held by most white Australian educators at that time. In fact, the approach in the four Northern territory pre-schools was quite innovatory: parental involvement was encouraged, natural play materials were used, and Aboriginal assistants were appointed to help the trained teachers following a short course of specialized training. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that at least some observers at the time did feel that the pre-schools were introducing conflicting demands, thus confusing the children and increasing their feelings of insecurity.

In making an overall review of pre-schooling for Aborigines during the mid-1960s, the following kinds of provision can be identified:

(i) Pre-schools established and staffed by the various church mission groups; this was the most typical kind of provision, especially on the more isolated reserves and settlements. The missions generally experienced difficulty in obtaining the services of suitably trained teachers, funding was inadequate even to cover the most basic needs, and continuity of effort was almost impossible to achieve. The aims of the pre-schools generally dovetailed in with the broader social welfare objectives of most missions – to bring the Aborigines up to white standards of living and thus expedite their eventual assimilation into the wider society. In general, the mission pre-schools had limited educational goals, and the only known evaluation of the effectiveness of such a program showed that the pre-school had no apparent influence on the cognitive development of the part-Aboriginal children who attended. This study was carried out during 1973 at Port Augusta in South Australia by Teasdale and de Vries (1976). (A brief report of the research and its outcomes is presented in Appendix I.)

(ii) In addition to the government sponsored pre-schools of the kind that were operating in the Northern Territory, some state governments had accepted limited responsibility for pre-school provisions on Aboriginal reserves. In Queensland, for example, several pre-schools had been established, and the training of indigenous pre-school teachers was begun in 1965 by the then Department of Native Affairs in that State. Likewise in South Australia, the Aborigines Protection Board had established pre-schools on several of the reserves, and was given some assistance in their operation by the Kindergarten Union.

(iii) Small numbers of Aborigines attended white pre-schools, generally in the inner-urban areas of cities, and in the larger country towns. There is no systematic record of their involvement in this way, and it is difficult to assess the extent of their attendance. Undoubtedly some of the Aborigines attending these pre-schools were children who had been adopted or fostered by white families, and for all intents and purposes were being brought up as Europeans. Under these circumstances the children generally made satisfactory educational progress. Dasen et al. (1973), for example, in a study of 35 Aborigines adopted by European families in Adelaide, concluded that the children in their sample were able to profit as much from the intellectual opportunities offered to them as were children of European descent.

(iv) From time to time various philanthropic societies were involved in sponsoring Aboriginal pre-schools. The Save the Children Fund, for example, accepted responsibility for establishing and running a number of pre-schools for Aborigines in New South Wales country towns, and at Port Lincoln in South Australia. The basic aim of these centres was to provide socialization experiences similar to those found in white homes, and so the activities were typical of the traditional white pre-school: periods of free play, painting, games, music, and story telling. Additionally, special stress was placed on nutrition (through the provision of nourishing meals), hygiene and general health practices. At Port Lincoln emphasis also was placed on language development and considerable time was spent in encouraging children to speak up clearly, experiment with new words, and speak in grammatically correct sentences. A follow-up study by Teasdale and de Vries (1976) of the Aboriginal children who had attended the Port Lincoln pre-school prior to 1972 showed that the program had significantly improved their level of English language ability compared with their peers who had not attended pre-school. (A more complete summary of the findings of this study may be found in Appendix I).

In summary, it is clear that relatively slow progress was being made in the overall provision of pre-schools for Aboriginal children during the mid 1960s. There were isolated instances of genuine concern and effective educational progress, but generally the situation was in the doldrums, largely because of the continuing ethnocentric emphasis of most programs. Pre-schooling was still being offered to Aborigines on white man's terms, and the reaction of most Aboriginal parents continued to be one of disinterest. A more effective and realistic approach was needed, but it was not until 1967 that the first real signs of progress started to emerge.

A New Era

The year 1967 proved to be a watershed in the field of Aboriginal education, and during the subsequent decade more change was to take place in basic philosophies, approaches and provisions than had occurred throughout the previous 179 years of European settlement. The watershed resulted from the confluence of several factors: the national referendum; changing community attitudes; a growing awareness of the extent to which the education system

had failed the Aboriginal people; the influence of North American writings in the field of compensatory education; and so on. Another major source of influence was a national seminar on Aboriginal education that was held during August 1967. The seminar was organized by the then director (Colin Tatz) and staff of the Centre for Research into Aboriginal Affairs at Monash University, and brought together a wide cross-section of 80 people from all mainland States and Territories of Australia. Seminar papers and discussion summaries later were published in a book entitled *Aborigines and Education* (Dunn and Tatz, 1969). A second national gathering was sponsored by Abschol (the Aboriginal Affairs Department of the then National Union of Australian University Students) early in 1968. Again approximately 80 people came together from around Australia for a three-day summer school to examine the teacher's role in Aboriginal education (Roper, 1969).

Undoubtedly the two seminars had a most important bearing on subsequent events. They were the first ever national gatherings that brought together people with a shared commitment to improving the effectiveness of Aboriginal education. Significantly, both seminars included representatives from the various groups of Aboriginal people, and their point of view was expressed with clarity and vigour. The noted Aboriginal poet, Kath Walker, had this to say at the Monash seminar (1969: 104–5):

> Those who lay down policy for the future education of the Aborigine must at all times remain aware of his dignity and pride, and care must be taken to see that *this is upheld at all costs*. . .
>
> The policy of the past, where Aborigines are expected to throw away completely their own way of life and become black replicas of a white race has damaged the Aborigine almost beyond repair. All that this has succeeded in doing is to swell the ranks of the Aboriginal fringe-dwellers who are learning about the European's way of life from the rejects of that society. The results of this we see today, and they are far from acceptable; they are cruel and inhuman. Unless an enlightened, humane policy is drawn up and acted upon by qualified people of both races, the Aborigine is destined to live and die on the fringe of European-Australian society, as present programmes can bring him only as far as that fringe.
>
> European-Australians must concede that their failure to help Aborigines in the past stems from the fact that they have never recognized the 'missing link' in the chain of harmony – the 'missing link' being the Aboriginal advisers and leaders. Surely the time has come where Aborigines can be approached and asked to help in their own advancement! Round table talks, involving the leaders of various communities, must take place before any policy can be accepted or acted upon.

In reviewing the changes that have occurred in Aboriginal education since 1967 it is important to note the influence of developments in the field of early childhood. The present authors, having compared developments during this period across the various levels of Aboriginal education (pre-school, primary, secondary, adult), firmly believe that the field of early childhood education provided the most far reaching stimulus for change. Almost all of the significant innovations and developments occurred at this level first, before gradually spreading to other levels of Aboriginal education. The main reason for this can be readily identified: during the 1960s there was a new emphasis throughout the western world on the importance of early child development. In educational terms, a firm foundation in the first five years was considered essential for later success in the school system. Interest in pre-schools thus proliferated, and increasing numbers of researchers, curriculum developers and administrators jumped onto the 'band-wagon' of early childhood education. Within Australia the field of early childhood became a prime focus for educational research and development, and funding became more readily available for initiatives at the pre-school level. This inevitably carried over into the field of Aboriginal education, where the provision of pre-school facilities was seen as the most promising solution to the problems of school failure amongst Aboriginal children.

It is clear that a great deal of the stimulus for change arose from several major action-research projects that were implemented at the early childhood level. Certainly no studies of comparable magnitude or scope were carried out at the primary, secondary or tertiary levels of Aboriginal education. Of particular interest is the fact that four of these projects owed their origins to the Monash seminar. Colin Tatz had especially invited a representative from the Bernard van Leer Foundation to attend the seminar as an observer. The Foundation subsequently expressed interest in receiving proposals for action-research with Aboriginal families, and so began the negotiations that led eventually to the funding of van Leer projects in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. A further two projects, with funding from other sources, also were initiated at about the same time, one at Bourke in the far north-west of New South Wales, the other at Katherine in the Northern Territory. In view of their wide significance a review of the work of these six projects comprises the major focus of the present monograph. Placed together, it is clear that they have played a very dominant role in shaping the direction of early childhood education provisions for Aboriginal Australians since 1967.

Before proceeding to a detailed review of each of the six projects, it is necessary to examine briefly their theoretical underpinnings.

Theoretical Bases of the Six Projects

Each project had to start with a rationale and a set of objectives. The formulation of an underlying philosophy proved to be a troublesome and conscience-stirring task for some. Others saw the issues as quite clear cut and had definite ideas and purposes. The contributions of each researcher, teacher and administrator undoubtedly were influenced by their prior experiences, prejudices and training. Nevertheless, there seem to have been three major sources of influence that had a pervasive effect upon the development of the projects.

The New Zealand Folk Movement

During the Second World War in Wellington, New Zealand, groups of women whose husbands were absent with the armed services met together for mutual support. In this way the play centre movement had its beginning, and during the subsequent two decades it spread throughout New Zealand, thus becoming one of the dominant influences in the field of early childhood education in that country. Early in the 1960s the movement spread to the indigenes of New Zealand, and within five years some 200 Maori communities had established their own play centres.

Lex Grey, who was closely associated with the early development of the play centre movement among the Maori people (see Chapter 4), describes it as a family-oriented folk movement that acknowledged the central role of education in the lives of individual parents and grandparents, equally with its role in the life of the individual child, of the family, and of the community or neighbourhood (Grey, 1976). Its essential feature was parental control and responsibility: groups of parents and children met with one another in order to establish, organize, equip and maintain their own centres.

In May 1967 11 Maori play centre supervisors attended the triennial conference of the Australian Pre-School Association in Canberra. Six members of the group subsequently visited the north coast of New South Wales and met with Aboriginal people in several communities. Thus began a series of cross-cultural exchanges that were to have a significant influence on developments in Australia.

The strong emphasis within the folk movement on family participation and responsibility had an immediate appeal to the Aboriginal people. Aboriginal society, whether traditional or detribalized, is based on a very tightly knit family structure. In fact, the importance of the family has increased with the progressive breakdown of traditional lifestyles. As Grey (1974: 8–9) points out:

> Whatever else is destroyed as a people is driven into apathy, the last stronghold to be destroyed is the family network. As pressures are placed upon a style of living, so people compress into their family network . . . Today, the New South Wales Aboriginal family is as compact, tight and resilient a network for all its members as it has ever been with any people.

The family-oriented philosophy of the New Zealand folk movement therefore was in close harmony with the values of the Aboriginal people, and offered them the chance to strengthen even further the concept of the family as a basic social and educative unit. Furthermore, the emphasis on local responsibility struck a responsive chord. Aborigines for too long had been offered education on white man's terms, and increasingly were agreeing with Kath Walker that: 'Surely the time has come where Aborigines can be approached and asked to help in their own advancement!' Many Aboriginal groups were ready to accept greater responsibility for the education of their children, and the New Zealand folk movement thus provided them with a suitable model that would assist in their search for self-determination.

The North American Compensatory Education Approach

The second source of influence was almost diametrically opposed to the New Zealand folk movement, especially in terms of its educational implications. It had its origins in North America during the early 1960s, and arose largely from a series of interlocking economic problems. Increasing automation was resulting in decreasing job opportunities for unskilled workers with the inevitable consequence of escalating unemployment. This was seen as a tremendous wastage, not only of financial resources paid out as unemployment and social service benefits, but a wastage of human resources also. Blame for this wastage was placed largely on the inadequacies of an educational system that had failed to meet the needs of many children from lower working class and depressed ethnic minority group backgrounds. Hence the concept of the 'deprived' or 'disadvantaged' child arose, and substantial resources were brought to bear on the problem.

The concept of disadvantage was seen as cyclical, with the basic problem being perpetuated from generation to generation. Williams (1970: 2–3) described the situation in the following way when discussing what he terms the 'War on Poverty' in the United States:

> Just as employment disadvantages underlay economic disadvantages, it was reasoned that educational disadvantages underlay those of employment. And when causes for educational disadvantage were explored, speculation led to a kind of developmental disadvantage associated with being reared in a home suffering from economic disadvantage. Thus a cycle was fully defined. (See Figure 2)

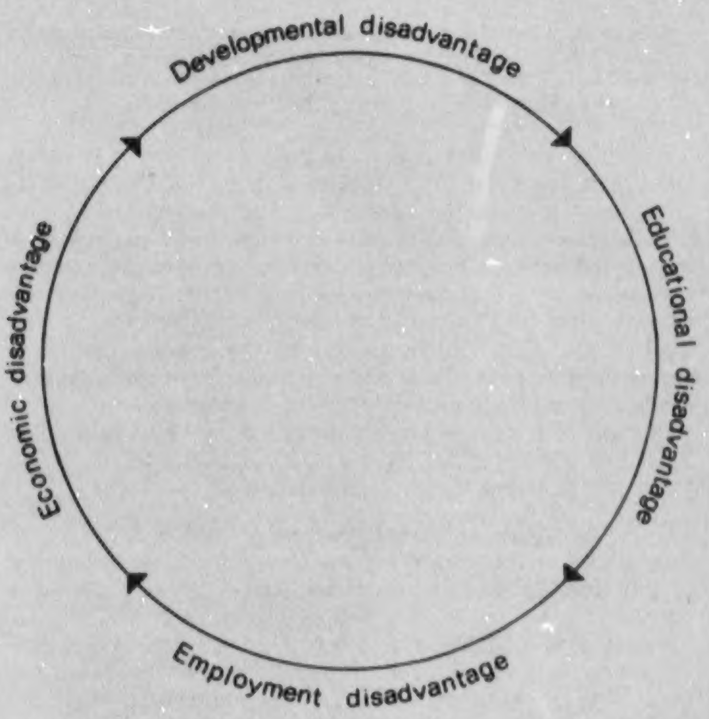

Figure 2 The cycle of disadvantage
Source: Williams, 1970:3.

Educationists focused particular attention on the concept of developmental disadvantage, believing that the major problem was one of retarded intellectual development due to lack of early environmental stimulation. With increasing emphasis being placed on the concepts of cumulative deficit and the irreversibility of early retardation, and with a growing swing to environmental explanations of child growth and development, the provision of adequate pre-school programs seemed to afford a much needed solution to the problem. A wave of optimism is apparent in most of the literature of this period. The answer had been found: intervene in the cycle of poverty by providing compensatory experiences during the pre-school years. Experimental programs proliferated, particularly in North America when public funds became widely available for this purpose.

The compensatory education movement had an undoubted influence in Australia, particularly during the late 1960s when the six projects under review were being established. Paradoxically, in fact, its influence probably was strongest at just the time when North American educationists were modifying their earlier optimism and realizing that the issues were not as simple and clear cut as had been assumed.

The Traditional Australian Approaches to Early Childhood Education

The majority of people associated with the various projects under review had been exposed for most of their lives, both as children and as adults, to a white, middle class oriented system of education. Despite their attempts to break from traditional moulds and work within a more creative and innovative framework, their prior experiences undoubtedly had a pervasive influence. Furthermore, in some States project staff were working within the constraints of existing structures and resources, and therefore had to contend with the relatively inflexible and conservative outlook that is characteristic of most large organizations. For both of these reasons, therefore, the influence of traditional approaches to early childhood education must not be overlooked.

The basic features of the traditional approach to pre-schooling in Australia have been aptly summarized by Scott and Darbyshire (1973: 12) in the following way:
(a) programs are more heavily influenced by teachers' observations of individual children's general progress and current interests rather than by some common, sequenced curriculum for all children; (b) there is concern with all main areas of development, rather than concentration on a narrower range of skills more directly related to academic progress. A high value is placed on activities which allow for creative effort and for the sharing of ideas; (c) self-initiated play is considered an important source of learning; (d) qualified teachers are employed; (e) parents are in active communication with teachers, but not usually responsible for taking a teaching role in the program.

A Differential Impact

The above three sources of influence had a differential impact on the development of each of the projects. Two of the projects – Bourke and New South Wales – were relatively free of any outside constraints. There was no requirement that they fit in with existing structures and organizations, and the co-ordinators therefore were able to develop a relatively independent stance. In both cases a very strong commitment was made to specific philosophies. Aspects of the North American compensatory education approach were dominant at Bourke, while the New South Wales project was based almost exclusively on the New Zealand folk movement.

The Victorian project also was reasonably free of organizational constraints, but in contrast to all of the other projects the members of its planning committee deliberately avoided any commitment to a particular approach. In fact, they had a far more basic starting point, that of defining the issues and developing an appropriate frame of reference. Thus they sought to interact with Aboriginal families in such a way that a suitable rationale and approach could evolve as naturally as possible during the course of the study.

In the remaining projects the influences were more evenly spread. All three attempted to fit in with existing administrative structures, and thus were circumscribed to some extent by external requirements. In South Australia, despite the fact that the compensatory education and folk movement approaches appear to be antithetical, an attempt was made to incorporate the two in a single statement of purpose. The union was an uneasy one, however, and led to some ambiguity and uncertainty. The Katherine and Queensland projects both were based within government departments of education, and therefore were influenced more strongly by traditional philosophies. During the early stages these two projects also incorporated aspects of the compensatory education approach, although this influence weakened as the projects progressed, especially in Queensland.

As time went by, the philosophy of the New South Wales project came to have an increasingly strong influence on the other projects. In particular, most projects moved towards greater parental participation in early childhood education, although only the South Australian project followed the New South Wales example of actually giving parents the responsibility for running a centre.

Having reviewed some of the general factors that influenced the development of the projects, the following six chapters will provide a detailed description of each project in turn. The chapters will follow a similar format, dealing sequentially with the setting, the rationale and objectives, the program of activities, the evaluation, and the wider achievements of the particular project under review.

Finally, a note on nomenclature: the four van Leer projects will be identified by the States in which they were located. In each case they were based in more than one centre in the State, and hence became known as the New South Wales, Victorian, South Australian and Queensland van Leer projects. Each of the remaining two projects was located in a single community, and so they have become widely known by the names of these townships. The present monograph therefore will adopt the established practice of referring to them simply as the Bourke and Katherine projects.

3

The Bourke Project

The Setting

When Australians wish to describe an area that is geographically remote and isolated they often resort to the phrase, 'back of Bourke'. Somehow the township of Bourke has become identified as the gateway to the arid interior of the continent. Yet it is an attractive place, and from the air appears as a green oasis on the banks of the Darling River. Located some 850 kilometres northwest of Sydney, Bourke has a population of 3500, approximately one-quarter of whom are of Aboriginal descent. During the 1960s about one-third of the Aborigines were living in makeshift housing at a reserve on the fringe of the town.

In 1966 a research project was commenced in the Bourke region by John Cawte*, a professor of psychiatry at the University of New South Wales. Its aim was to study the applicability of the principles of community psychiatry and medicine to a rural setting. The results of this survey highlighted the need for urgent action to ameliorate the very depressed circumstances of many of the Aborigines. *Project Enrichment of Childhood* therefore was established during 1969 with financial backing from the Australian Mineral Industries Research Association and the Australian Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

The purpose of the project was to provide compensatory preschooling on an integrated basis for both whites and Aborigines. The management of the project became the responsibility of Barry Nurcombe*, a psychiatrist, and Paul Moffitt, a clinical psychol-

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*Cawte and Nurcombe are both ethnopsychiatrists with extensive research experience amongst Aboriginal groups, especially in Northern Australia. Their involvement in the field of pre-school education was a logical extension of their interest in applying the principles of community psychiatry to Aboriginal contexts.

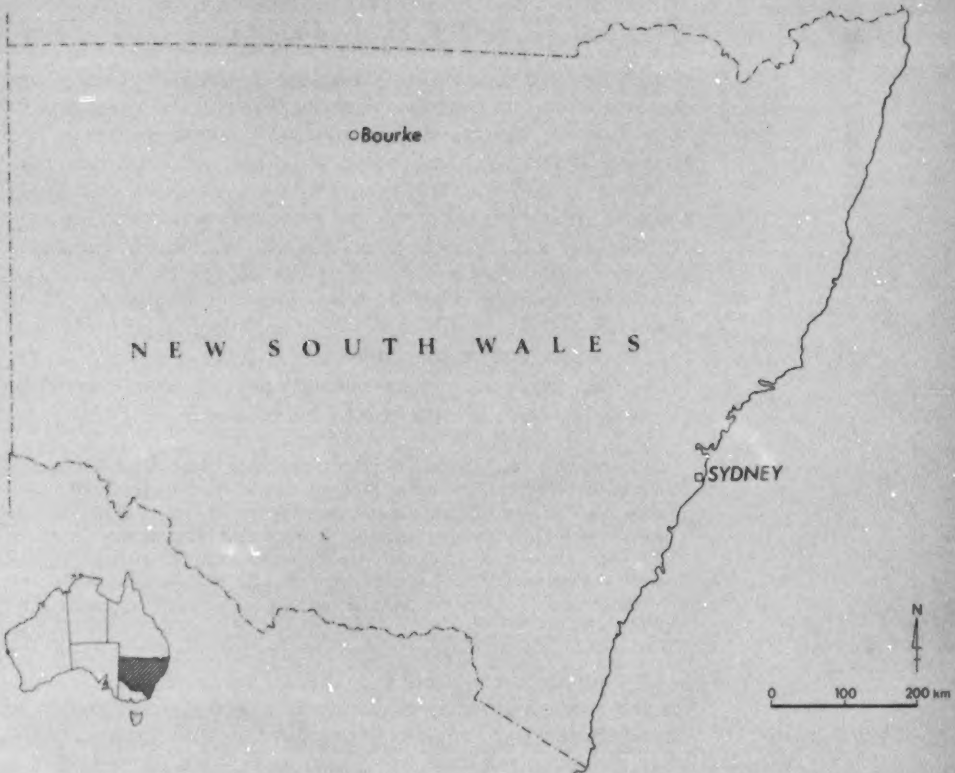

Figure 3 New South Wales showing location of Bourke

ogist. When the latter left during 1972 to take up a position in North America, Philip de Lacey of the University of Wollongong took over his role as co-director.

During the latter months of 1969 an old house in Bourke was purchased and renovated. Two large and attractive teaching areas were provided, together with a kitchen, office and toilets. The teaching areas were well separated from each other to allow concurrent programs to operate without any interference from each other. By the beginning of 1970 two teachers had been appointed, and the program commenced at the start of the school year.

The Objectives

The project at Bourke was based firmly on the North American compensatory education model, so much so that an early paper setting out the rationale of the study simply was entitled: 'Cultural deprivation and language defect'. In this paper (Nurcombe and Moffitt, 1970) the underlying philosophy was explained in quite straightforward terms: the Aboriginal children at Bourke were deprived of certain *patterns* of experience that are of major importance in later educational achievement. The total picture is of a series of interlocking and self-perpetuating, vicious circles: malnutrition, infection, infestation, low achievement aims, language and concept impoverishment, and social disintegration. The most critical time and place to intervene and reverse this process is during the pre-school years. In particular, the children's major scholastic handicap is an impoverishment of English language. Therefore their other difficulties must be subordinated to the need to improve their communication skills.

Writing about the project some three years later, Nurcombe continued to paint an equally clear-cut picture:

> The project began as an intervention based on the deprivation model, thus fringe-dwelling part-Aborigines do poorly at primary school mainly because of their poor verbal competence in standard English. The deficit is due theoretically to lack of approprate stimulation in the pre-school years and afterwards. Pre-school intervention should, therefore, stress language development. The most appropriate form of language stimulation for the Australian rural setting therefore should be devised, tested, developed and refined. (Nurcombe et al., 1973: 626)

Despite the strong emphasis on language development, attention also was paid to other cognitive and affective areas. Nurcombe elsewhere refers to the need to develop competencies in the areas of cognition, perception, spatial skills, and also in the ability to sustain separation anxiety, to concentrate and attend to formal school tasks, and to derive pleasure from achievement (Nurcombe, 1976: 120).

When compared with the other projects, the objectives of the pre-school at Bourke were very clearly and comprehensively specified. One gains the clear impression that the directors of the Bourke project knew exactly where they were going and what they wanted to achieve in the long term. Nurcombe (1976: 126–7), for example, set out a precise list of aims that remained essentially the same over the four-year period 1970–73. The aims were subdivided into affective, perceptual-motor, language and cognitive objectives, and lists were provided of specific skills that would be taught systematically to all children.

It was inevitable in the educational climate of Australia during the early 1970s that such a clear commitment to a compensatory approach would generate criticism and controversy. Nevertheless, the project staff maintained an ideological stance based upon the deficit model, although some acquiescence to opposing viewpoints is evident in their later publications. Writing in 1974, for example, they stated:

> The Bourke pre-school will continue to employ and test teaching strategies which enrich the learning environment of the culturally disadvantaged. While at the same time the cultural difference of the groups is respected, our aim has been and will be to foster maximal intellectual development in adaptation to the social environment. (Taylor et al., 1974: 33)

One can sense in the above statement at least some acknowledgment of the positive features of the Aboriginal sub-cultures in Bourke. This also is reflected in an extension during 1973 and 1974 of the objectives of the project. Although the compensatory emphasis was continued, attempts were made to link the teaching program much more closely with the children's day-to-day experience in the home and local community (de Lacey, 1974). Greater emphasis also was placed on parent involvement and home-school liaison.

The aims of the pre-school have continued largely unaltered since 1974, although the above modifications to the compensatory approach have been clarified and restated. Thus de Lacey (1980) now talks about a 'pragmatic deficit hypothesis' providing the rationale for the Bourke program. Essentially this concept represents an attempt to retain elements of the old deprivation/deficit approach while avoiding any derogation of the culture and lifeways of minority groups. This seeming illogicality is explained by de Lacey (1980: 5) in the following way:

> . . . while there are elements of the traditional Deficit Model which are antithetical to the interests of minority-group children, there are at the same time other components which seem essential to the attainment of major educational and social objectives. These are the elements that recognise the long-standing and continuing resilience of the anglo-derived base of Australian culture. It is now possible to bring the cognitive development of most minority-group children closer to modes that can lead to the attainment of key skills often resulting in greater school success . . . Furthermore, it is now becoming clear that, through research undertaken at Bourke, Weipa and elsewhere, this objective can be substantially attained without prejudicing the development of positive self concepts and using content appropriate to the ecology of minority groups.

On the basis of the above statement, then, the prime goal of the pre-school becomes that of helping the children of Bourke to acquire those skills that will allow them access to social, economic and political power in Australian society, while at the same time preserving the values and life styles of their own particular sub-cultures (de Lacey, interview, 1980).

The Program

An important feature of the Bourke project was the very careful attention that was given to the question of research design. The other projects all seem to have started by selecting a particular program and then turning to the problem of evaluation. At Bourke, the reverse procedure was adopted: a particular experimental methodology was chosen and a teaching program then devised to fit in with it.

The basic design involved the selection each year of two experimental groups (E_1 and E_2) matched in terms of age, ethnic mix, and performance on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT). Each group then was divided on the basis of PPVT scores into two classes for teaching purposes, one upper ability and the other lower ability. In other words there were four classes: E_1 upper: E_2 upper; E_1 lower; E_2 lower. Ability grouping was used in this way for the sake of the teachers. It was felt they would cope more effectively if marked intragroup variations in learning rate were avoided.

All children were pre-tested on initial entry to the pre-school. Each of the two experimental groups then was exposed to a different teaching program for nine months. At the end of the year they were post-tested in order to determine the degree and characteristics of any changes that had occurred. The children then were tested again for follow-up purposes after they had spent eight months in the regular primary (i.e. elementary) school program. For ethical reasons, the project co-ordinators did not feel justified in including a simultaneous no-treatment control group in the study. Nevertheless, they did test in 1970 a comparison group of children in their first year of regular primary school who had not had any pre-school experience.

Selection procedures involved the use each year of the PPVT to test all children in Bourke who would be eligible to commence pre-school in the following February. Nurcombe (1976) notes that the popularity of the pre-school was such that all eligible children were brought voluntarily each year for testing. From the total number of children tested (this varied between 50 and 73 in any one year), the 44 with the lowest scores were chosen, the parents of the remainder being advised that their children were progressing well and had no need of the special program. All children thus excluded were white. Conversely, all the Aboriginal children in Bourke were selected each year, together with a small number of whites, most of whom came from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds. Since the mid-1970s it has not been necessary to exclude any applicants. Declining birth-rates in Bourke have resulted in less children of pre-school age. Almost all four-year-olds in the town now attend the pre-school, with Aborigines usually comprising about half of the total enrolment.

The basic approach between 1970 and 1973 was to compare the effectiveness of two contrasting teaching programs that differed in terms of degree of structure, teacher- versus child-centredness, and precision of sequence. All children attended the pre-school for two hours each day, two classes being held in the morning and two in the afternoon. Morning and afternoon classes were switched several times during the year. Each teacher taught each program at each level. Thus one teacher might take classes E_1 upper and E_2 lower for a year, the other E_2 upper and E_1 lower. Because the teaching programs varied considerably each year, separate descriptions will be given on a year-by-year basis.

In 1970 the comparison of programs was polarized by studying a highly structured versus a traditional unstructured approach. The latter was designed to resemble as closely as possible a suburban Australian pre-school, with the usual free play activities followed by periods of singing and rhythm, art and craft, outdoor play, nature study, and so on. In particular, however, the teachers sought to expose the children to a more stimulating English language environment through story telling, poetry, verbal games and conversational play.

The structured approach was based on the controversial and widely publicized program devised by Bereiter and Engelmann (1966). Nurcombe (1976: 91) has provided a very clear account of its main features:

> Working with a group of five children, the teacher asks for individual and group responses to her questions, changing rhythmically from one to the other and rewarding the child who tries with verbal praise (or, initially, with candy or dried fruit). Incorrect responses are immediately corrected; but the child is always rewarded for trying. Shouting responses are reinforced, and there is much repetition – pattern drill – of basic language structures such as identity statements, attribution, interrogatives, negatives, polar opposites, comparatives and superlatives, *and* and *or* constructions, prepositions, and *if-then* constructions. The general atmosphere is one of excitement, demand, noise, and involvement such that the inhibited child is carried along by the spirit of the group and the teacher, through her request for individual responses, always knows how each child is functioning.
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> The advantages of the techniques are five-fold: the deliberate building in the child of a need for and a pleasure in mastery; the clear objectives and the well-designed steps for reaching them; the built-in feedback system for the teacher associated with the individual responses; the absence of competitive pressure between children; and the highly economic use of time in that the teaching technique ensures the maximum, intense teacher-child contact.

The Bourke project, unable to afford the luxury of Bereiter and Engelmann's small classes, had to be content with a teacher-child ratio of one to eleven. In adapting the original program, more emphasis was placed on language activities than upon skills in other areas. The daily two-hour sessions incorporated three 30-minute periods of intensive and highly structured group work, interspersed with periods of equivalent length that were spent in free play or snack time. The free play periods provided both teacher and pupils with a necessary opportunity to recuperate from the intensity of the group work. Even observers found the experience exhausting and commented upon the necessity for breaks.

In 1971 both experimental groups were exposed to the Bereiter-Engelmann program. Test results had indicated the relative success of this approach, and so its use was continued. The results also showed, however, that neither approach in 1970 had produced gains in those psychomotor aspects that had been evaluated. Accordingly it was decided to manipulate this aspect of development as the experimental variable in 1971. One experimental group therefore was taught using the Frostig program for the development of visual perception, a specific approach based on five perceptual subfunctions: eye-hand co-ordination; figure-ground perception; form constancy; position in space; and spatial relations (Frostig and Horne, 1964). The second experimental group was provided with a perceptual-motor stimulation program devised by Nurcombe and his colleagues especially for use at Bourke. It was designed to contrast with the Frostig program by using play materials similar to those found in conventional pre-schools, and by allowing the children more latitude in exploration and construction. Materials and techniques included block building, cutting and pasting, colouring, bead threading, picture matching, jigsaw completion, dough play, etc. Both of the new programs were taught for 20 minutes each day in place of one of the free play periods.

It is interesting to note the shift so early in the Bourke project from an almost exclusive emphasis on language development to incorporation of perceptual-motor activities. This change in emphasis perhaps reinforces Lex Grey's contention that Aborigines have a different style of perceptual growth and hence required specific assistance in this area.

The two perceptual programs were relatively successful and hence were retained in 1972. As a contrast to the Bereiter-Engelmann program, however, it was decided to expose one of the experimental groups to a semi-structured program that was more directly related to the children's everyday experiences. Although having the same basic emphasis on linguistic development as the Bereiter-Engelmann approach, the new program attempted to build upon structures already present within the children, rather than introducing concepts that were artificial or alien to their experience. The program was based largely upon Piaget's principle of optimal discrepancy which asserts that new learning will occur only when there is some connection between the new concept and the present cognitive structure (Taylor et al., 1974).

The introduction of the new program was a significant development for the Bourke project. Known as the extended-experience program, it was initiated and prepared largely by Philip de Lacey. Compared with the Bereiter-Engelmann approach, the teaching techniques were less formal, less direct, and less structured, with more emphasis placed on the Piagetian notion of helping the child to develop a sensorimotor basis for intellectual and language development. The program sought to draw upon the child's experience in order to foster development in five ways (Nurcombe, 1976: 136–7):

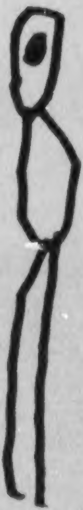
(i) by stimulating the use of language in spontaneous or guided activities, especially sociodramatic play;

(ii) by organizing more activity in the natural environment (e.g. by using excursions, nature study, etc.);

(iii) by fostering more divergent thinking, in contrast to the convergent processes heavily emphasized by Bereiter and Engelmann;

(iv) by stimulating a sense of individual identity and fostering a positive self concept through the experience of success; and

(v) by arranging greater parental involvement through the provision of homework*.



The above program proved relatively successful and was retained in 1973. However the specially devised perceptual-motor program by then was producing inferior results to the Frostig program and its use was discontinued. During 1973, then, the two experimental groups were exposed to the Bereiter-Engelmann and extended-experience programs respectively. Additionally, the Frostig program was taught to both groups for 20 minutes daily.

Until 1973 the Bourke project was based almost exclusively in the classroom. Although regular contact was maintained each year with parents, they did not participate directly in the teaching program. Their involvement in the pre-school itself was limited to cleaning and to the preparation of food for snack time. The teachers also saw many of the parents each day when they used the pre-school station wagon to pick up and return those children requiring transport. Nevertheless, many outside observers felt that there was a basic discontinuity between home and pre-school, despite attempts within the extended-experience program to involve parents through 'homework' activities. Parents generally were not familiar with the content of the teaching programs and so the activities of the pre-school were not being reinforced in the children's homes. Conversely, the teaching programs still used many concepts and approaches that were alien to the life style of the children and their families.

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*Homework involved the completion of simple tasks requiring parental assistance; for example, the construction of different coloured objects, and cutting out pictures of objects of different shapes and sizes. (See Nurcombe, 1976:237-41 for further details.)

Probably in response to criticisms of discontinuity and lack of effective parental involvement, an important change was made at the beginning of 1973 by the addition of a home-school liaison teaching program. Two additional teachers were appointed, one Aboriginal and one white, and a program devised that slotted in with the experimental teaching programs. Nurcombe (1976: 139) explains its operation in the following way:

> For thirty minutes each week one of the liaison teachers visits the home of each child. There, in the mother's presence, the teacher conducts with the child a planned lesson on a particular topic. If the lesson is on polar opposites, for example, the teacher offers illustrations of *big* and *small*, *tall* and *short*, *fat* and *thin*. The mother is invited to join the interchange. After the lesson the mother is given relevant material (scissors, coloured paper, books, predesigned puzzles, written instructions, problems) to complete with the child before the scheduled meeting in the following week. Each week's lessons are designed, as far as possible, to complement, consolidate, and extend the new concepts introduced in the pre-school that week.

Since 1973 the Bourke project has continued to operate, albeit a little uncertainly at times due to occasional staffing difficulties and the need to negotiate annually for funds. The latter has posed particular problems due to disagreements between government departments at both federal and state levels about the most appropriate source of funding. In 1978, for example, the federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs withdrew support, seeking to transfer responsibility to the Department of Social Security. During the resulting imbroglio staff at Bourke went unpaid for two months until the Department of Social Security provided interim support. Attempts then were made to shift responsibility across to the state government in New South Wales. Eventually a compromise was reached whereby state and federal authorities agreed jointly to fund the pre-school. Support still needs to be negotiated annually, however, and considerable time and effort are wasted in protracted negotiation. The resulting uncertainty also has an unsettling effect on teachers, parents and the local community.

Unfortunately the directors of the project have not published any further descriptions of the teaching program, and it is not easy to obtain a clear picture of modifications and developments that have taken place in recent years. It appears, however, that a marriage has taken place between the Bereiter-Englemann and the extended-experience programs of 1972–73, the resulting union being known as the 'modified Bereiter-Engelmann approach'. A deficit hypothesis therefore is still being accepted as the starting point for a structured enrichment program that seeks to foster the children's language, number and conceptual development.

The basic pattern of teaching continues, the children still attending in separate morning and afternoon groups with the two-hour sessions being timetabled in alternating 20-minute periods of intensive instruction and free play. The shouting out of responses remains a basic feature of the teaching method, following the recommendations of Bereiter and Engelmann (1966). Increasing emphasis, however, is now being placed on the use of objects and events from the children's immediate environment, especially during language activities. Excursions are being used to good effect in this regard, and increasingly are becoming the source of language drills as children recall their experiences and the teacher incorporates them into the lesson content. The use of videotape recording equipment has provided the children with an entertaining yet effective means of reviewing specific incidents and experiences that took place during a visit. In recent years the teaching program also has incorporated stories and activities based upon Aboriginal culture, and there has been positive recognition of the values and lifeways of the local Aboriginal community. The aim here, of course, has been to enhance the self-image of pupils and develop pride in their Aboriginal heritage.

Unfortunately the home-school liaison program has operated only intermittently since 1976 due to restrictions in funding. During 1977–78 it ceased to function, and subsequently a teacher aide has been employed for only one half-day per week, her task being to visit the homes of all children with the dual aims of linking pre-school learning experiences with family and community activities, and trying to engage parents in a mutual effort to support their children's development. The two teachers also have shared in the home visiting program from time to time. In one sense the need for a program of this kind has declined due to the very close rapport that has been established between the pre-school and the local community. In particular, relationships with the Aboriginal people of Bourke have strengthened considerably and there is now far more informal involvement by mothers in the day-to-day running of the pre-school. Furthermore, most of the teacher aide positions have been filled by Aborigines, up to four being employed on a half-time basis in any given year. As in other projects, participation of this kind has provided a particularly effective link between pre-school and community.

The pre-school continues to offer a range of support services, including the provison of medical and dental treatment, daily transport, and a nutritious snack for each child. A library also operates, the children being allowed to take appropriate books home on a regular basis.

Relationships with the local infant and primary schools were slow to develop, and one suspects that in the early years of the project their staffs had little appreciation of what the pre-school was trying to achieve. Certainly there is no evidence of any systematic attempt being made to provide follow-up experiences for the children. It appears that the directors of the project gave relatively low priority to the question of continuity of schooling, preferring to focus their energies almost exclusively on the pre-school. This is unfortunate. Although time-consuming, it would have been a fruitful enterprise to develop sufficiently effective rapport with infant school teachers to allow follow-up programs to be implemented at that level. Fortunately the situation has improved a great deal in recent years as the pre-school has become more embedded in the local educational scene. Philip de Lacey, the current consultant to the project, reports that the schools now show much more interest in the activities of the pre-school, and are trying to implement some of the approaches and methods that the pre-school has begun (interview, 1980).

What is the future of the project? Before withdrawing in 1978 the Department of Aboriginal Affairs initiated the establishment of a local committee to administer the affairs of the pre-school. It was arranged that a committee of approximately 12 members be elected annually at an open public meeting, with half of the membership comprising Aborigines. Full financial and administrative responsibility was shifted from the University of Wollongong to the local committee at the beginning of 1979, Philip de Lacey's role changing from that of project director to educational consultant. Since then all government funds have been paid direct to the Bourke committee, members having responsibility for employment of staff and disbursement of all funds. Ann Eckermann, an anthropologist who lectures at the Armidale College of Advanced Education, has been appointed as a second consultant, and has played an especially effective role in the area of community-school relationships.

Unfortunately the respective funding and support roles of the federal Department of Social Security (Office of Child Care) and the New South Wales Department of Youth and Community Services still had not been clarified fully by the end of 1980, and there remained considerable uncertainty regarding the long-term future of the Bourke pre-school. It appeared, however, that the local committee would need to continue annual negotiations for barely adequate support, thus maintaining the frustrating pattern of previous years.

The Evaluation

Compared with the other five projects, Bourke was exemplary in the attention given to evaluation, at least in the early years of its operation. Even those who disagree with the basic rationale must admit that Barry Nurcombe and his colleagues approached this aspect of their work in a thorough and systematic fashion. As indicated earlier the experimental design was central in the planning of the project, involving pre-, post, and follow-up testing using a variety of standardized instruments. Although there was some variation from year to year, the following tests were used fairly consistently: the revised ITPA (generally only the auditory association, visual association and grammatic closure sub-tests); the PPVT; the information, geometric designs and vocabulary sub-tests of the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI); the Draw-a-Person Test (DAP); the Nixon Test of Classification; and, since 1973, the Boehm Test of Basic Concepts. All of these are well-known standardized instruments, except for the Nixon Test, which requires children to manipulate 20 wooden rods that vary in terms of colour, height and diameter, the basic task involving reclassification of sets of rods according to one or other of these attributes.

Nurcombe (1976: 143) has provided a detailed justification for the selection of these particular tests. He concludes thus:

> The areas of evaluation should be checked against the stated objectives of the pre-school. It will be noted that although we have attained a reasonable coverage of the language, cognitive and perceptual-motor objectives, we have not been able to find or design tests of the affective objectives with acceptable reliability or validity. So far as possible we have attempted to use standard tests that are suitable for Australian school-children and have had adequate studies of reliability and validity.

Straightforward procedures were used for the tabulation and analysis of the data: scores of all pre-tests, post-tests and follow-up tests were expressed as means and standard deviations for each teaching technique, ethnic group and teacher, and for upper and lower ability classes, for no-treatment controls (when available, on follow-up), and for various combinations of these variables. The researchers were especially interested in comparisons between structured, semi-structured and unstructured classes, and in 1971 and 1972 between the Frostig program and the locally devised perceptual-motor program. A simple yet cautious approach was taken with data analysis: 'Whenever comparative gain scores were used for statistical analysis, care was taken to ensure that pre-test scores were not significantly different; in fact we ascertained that they were virtually equivalent. One-tailed *t*-tests of significance were performed on all comparisons'. (Nurcombe, 1976: 143–4)

A brief, year-by-year summary now will be given of the main outcomes of the evaluation:

1970: Overall, the children participating in the traditional, unstructured program showed modest gains on three measures only: the auditory reception, auditory association and verbal expression sub-tests of the revised ITPA. The structured program, on the other hand, produced more substantial gains on these sub-tests, together with significant improvements on most of the other instruments that were used. Though not fully conclusive, it appeared that splitting the structured classes into ability groups facilitated teaching. Neither program produced changes in the test of perceptual-motor co-ordination; there was some evidence, in fact, that both groups lost ground in this area. At a more general level, Nurcombe (1976: 150) concluded that:

> From a social viewpoint, the pre-school programmes were a great success. Children who at the beginning were bewildered, inhibited, and mute were by the end of the school year mixing well and concentrating on problems for up to forty minutes at a time; moreover, they were able to answer questions directed to them, gain pleasure from achievement, and respond to praise. Superficial observation revealed no difference in this result between the structured and unstructured classes. Both white and Aboriginal mothers had been reasonably reliable in attending at their scheduled times.

1971: It will be recalled that in 1971 all children were exposed to the structured Bereiter-Engelmann program, but that contrasting perceptual-motor programs were implemented. The results showed that both ethnic groups achieved significant gains on all tests of verbal ability. There was one exception only: Aboriginal children did not improve their performance on the grammatic closure sub-test of the ITPA. Overall, none of the gains were as impressive as those made by the structured groups in 1970, while Nurcombe (1976: 150–1) also adds that, aside from the PPVT, 'Aboriginal gains were less than white gains despite the fact that Aborigines, uniformly, had lower pre-test scores (and could have been expected to show larger regression artefacts). Whites approached or exceeded the norms on all post-tests: Aborigines remained well below the norms, still, on post-testing'.

Compared with 1970, modest improvements in perceptual-motor functioning were attained for both ethnic groups on the two newly introduced programs. Although the gains were not striking, it appeared that both programs had the potential to influence children's perceptual-motor development.

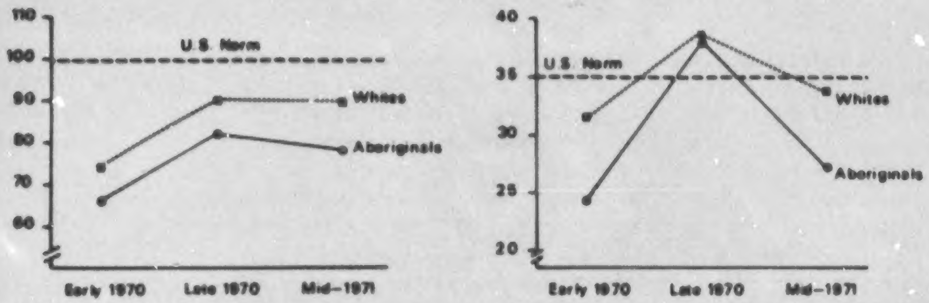
1972: The major innovation during 1972 was the introduction of the extended-experience program based on Piagetian principles. A comparison of the effects of the two programs on the combined ethnic groups shows gains of approximately equivalent significance on most measures. The structured program, however, was superior in its effect upon the visual association sub-test of the ITPA and the geometric designs sub-test of the WPPSI. Overall, the gain scores of Aborigines in the two programs were not significantly different, although there was a general trend for the structured program to yield superior results. A similar pattern was evident for the whites, except that visual association performance again was significantly better for the structured group. In summary, although the extended-experience program yielded promising results, it was not as impressive as the Bereiter-Engelmann program in achieving gains. Nevertheless, since it was an innovatory program that had never been applied before, the Bourke research team felt that it should be polished and implemented again the following year.

Evaluation of the two perceptual-motor programs again showed relatively modest gains. The Frostig program tended to be superior, and therefore was retained on its own for the following year in preference to the locally devised program.

1973: The basic approach in 1973 was little different from that of the previous year, except that the locally produced perceptual-motor program was dropped and all children were involved in the newly introduced home-school liaison teaching. Overall, the results showed the 1973 programs to have been less successful than those of 1972, although significant gains continued to be made on most tests. The extended-experience program in 1973 appeared to produce superior results with the Aboriginal children, while there was inconclusive evidence that the structured program was more effective for whites.

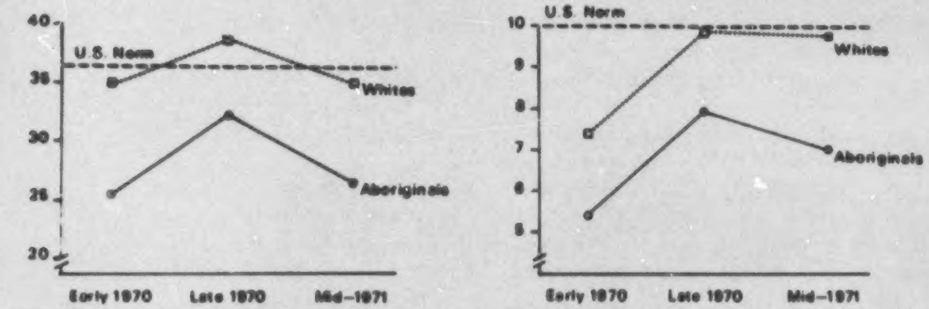
Regrettably the results of the teaching programs since 1973 had still not been published by the end of 1980, even in draft form. Although pre- and post-testing has continued each year except 1977, the data do not appear to have been analysed systematically, and there is no way of determining the extent of any subsequent improvements in the children's gain scores. The only remaining data therefore are those that were generated in follow-up studies of the children after they had commenced regular primary schooling.

A control group of 23 first-grade children who had never been to pre-school was tested at the Bourke primary schools in 1970. The following two years the first and second intakes from the pre-school likewise were tested, thus allowing a time lapse of eight months from completion of pre-schooling. Also in 1972 testing was carried out with another control group of 36 first-grade, non-pre-school children who were matched for age, sex and race with 15 Aborigines and 21 whites who had attended the pre-school in 1971. The general pattern to emerge from the data analyses was



(i) Mean scaled scores on the PPVT

(ii) Mean scaled scores on the ITPA auditory association sub-test



(iii) Mean scaled scores on the ITPA grammatic closure sub-test

(iv) Mean scaled scores on the WPSSI vocabulary sub-test

Figure 4 Graphs showing the results of testing the 1970 Bereiter-Engelmann sample

Source: de Lacey et al., 1973:173.

for the pre-schoolers to perform at higher levels than the controls on all comparisons, although only about one-third of these reached a statistically significant level. This pattern was much the same for both Aborigines and whites. Graphic representation of the pre-, post-, and follow-up results of the pre-schoolers also provided a fairly consistent pattern on all tests: the Aborigines scored lower than the whites on pre-testing; they gained at least as much as the whites at post-testing; and they lost a greater proportion of their gains than the whites at follow-up testing. An example of these trends is shown in Figure 4. These graphs are based on the 1970 sample that was exposed to the structured Bereiter-Engelmann program. Overall, the Aboriginal children showed a considerable regression in performance after only eight months of regular primary schooling, leading de Lacey et al. (1973: 175–6) to conclude that:

> . . . an erosion of gains made at pre-school is not unexpected since low income children tend to be exposed to non-consolidating experiences before and after school while they are attending the enrichment program and most of the time after they leave. It appears then that substantial and permanent cognitive gains are likely only after a modification of total life experience.

A second follow-up study was carried out in mid-1974 when approximately 10 children who had attended the pre-school were selected from each of the first four grades of the Bourke primary schools (de Lacey and Nurcombe, 1977). They were matched as far as possible according to age, grade, sex and race with children who had not attended the pre-school. In this way it was hoped to follow up each of the pre-school groups from 1970 to 1973 by comparing their test performance with that of non-pre-school controls. Unfortunately, however, the study had three major limitations: (a) No attempt was made to differentiate between children from the two contrasting pre-school programs each year. (b) The sample sizes were too small for realistic comparison (the average when data were analysed separately for Aboriginal and white samples was five). (c) The only non-pre-school Aborigines were children whose families had migrated to Bourke after they had turned five. They therefore were not a representative sample of local Aboriginal children.

Not surprisingly, the results of the study were somewhat inconclusive, with relatively few comparisons reaching statistical significance. Nevertheless, the authors claimed that

> . . . the results show a significantly consistent trend for children who have attended the pre-school to perform better on the test battery than those who have not. The finding is generally true for both Aboriginal and white populations. (de Lacey and Nurcombe, 1977: 87)

Overall, it was concluded that the project could claim considerable success in terms of the persistence of cognitive and language gains during the first four years of primary school. The present writers, however, consider that the published data do not support such a confident conclusion. It would seem more appropriate to conclude that, despite the considerable erosion of initial gains, there was limited evidence of the positive effects of pre-schooling persisting into the fourth year of primary school.

It is disappointing that restrictions of time and funding have prevented a more thorough evaluation of the Bourke project. The careful attention given to assessment in the early years of the pre-school has not been maintained, and by the end of 1980 still no data had been published on the effectiveness of the 1974 and subsequent experimental programs, either in the form of pre- and post-test comparisons or follow-up studies of later school performance. It appears, however, that testing has continued (except during 1977), de Lacey (interview 1980) reporting that the basic trends of the early findings have been maintained; i.e. test results have shown greater gains for the Aboriginal children, but the whites have retained their gains for a longer time.

De Lacey (interview, 1978) has identified two additional findings that are of considerable interest. First, pre-testing has revealed a gradual rise each year in the cognitive and language abilities of the children entering pre-school. He attributes this in part to the influence of older siblings who formerly attended the pre-school, and also to the positive effects of the home visiting program. Second, subjective observations suggest that the pre-school children are more voluble and articulate than their non-pre-school peers once they enter primary school, and that they respond more readily in group discussions. These behavioural differences apparently persist for some years, perhaps even into secondary school. Unfortunately, however, they have not been researched with sufficient rigour to allow firm conclusions to be drawn about their nature and extent.

In summary, it appears that at least during the early years of its operation the Bourke pre-school was very effective in achieving its immediate objectives in the language, cognitive and perceptual-motor domains. The Bereiter-Engelmann and Frostig programs seemed particularly successful in this regard, although the contribution of the extended-experience program must not be overlooked. Quite clearly, these conclusions only can be supported to the extent that one is prepared to accept evaluation procedures based solely upon the analysis of standardized test scores. While the project apparently was successful in the short term, the follow-up studies were less definitive in their findings, although there is some evidence that the benefits of pre-schooling might be persisting into the fourth grade of primary school.

The Achievements

One of the most unique features of the Bourke project is the continuity that has been achieved during its decade of operation, staff changes notwithstanding. In particular, the underlying philosophy of the program has been maintained despite the general unpopularity of a deficit hypothesis amongst Australian educators. One cannot help but admire the persistence of the project directors in following through their objectives in the face of quite widespread criticism and antagonism. As Nurcombe has stated:

> The noisy pattern drill of the Bereiter-Engelmann program often disturbs those who are used to gentler, less direct teaching . . . Others have been

> openly hostile on the basis that we are destroying Aboriginal identity, wasting our time on irrelevancies when the most important problems are otherwise (medical, legal, housing and so forth), imposing discredited middle-class white aspirations upon an alien group, or focussing excessively on language without adequate sensorimotor foundation. (Nurcombe, 1976: 175)

Although sensitive to criticisms such as these, the project directors have avoided the temptation to change their approach to suit the educational climate of the day. Instead, they have been prepared to tackle their critics head on:

> We do not apologise for a deficit hypothesis. It is quite defensible on pragmatic grounds. We still think that it provides the most appropriate and productive direction for us to take, as long as it avoids any derogation of the values and lifestyle of particular groups. (de Lacey, interview, 1980)

In reaffirming their rationale, de Lacey and Nurcombe have expressed several beliefs:

(i) The Aboriginal people of Bourke have not been able to make realistic choices about their future because they are not aware of the range of options open to them, nor do they understand the implications of choosing a particular option. Self-determination therefore is not feasible at this stage.

(ii) Real choice is contingent upon the ability to manipulate the political and economic systems of the majority society. In relation to the Bourke Aborigines the following questions thus arise: 'How can we help them to decide, acquire, and use what they want of our culture? How can we help them attain a position where choice is possible . . . a position where they can pursue their own goals?' (Nurcombe, 1976: 186).

(iii) The answers to these questions lie in the provision of intensive school intervention programs, especially during the early childhood years. Hence the highly structured approach of the Bourke project, and its strong commitment to working at the pre-school level.

(iv) The immediate goal is school success and thus greater access to the dominant culture. The longer term goal is for the Aboriginal people to contribute to the education of their own children. Once their opportunity for choice has been developed, and once they can take responsibility for setting their own educational goals, then the current approach of the Bourke pre-school will become an anachronism.

One basic question arises from the above: how successful has been the Bourke pre-school in achieving its immediate and longer term goals? The results of testing already have been elaborated in detail. It seems fair to conclude that the pre-school has achieved short-term success, although educational gains have eroded quite quickly, partly because of lack of attention to follow through programs in the primary school. The trend for each annual intake to score slightly higher at pre-testing is an interesting one. Undoubtedly the pre-school can claim some credit for this, especially through its home visiting program, although it is impossible to assess the relative impact of other environmental changes such as the introduction of television, general improvements in living conditions, better health care, and more effective approaches to community development (see, for example, Kamien, 1978).

The wider social impact of the pre-school is harder to gauge. It will be recalled that the project grew out of the field of community psychiatry, and one therefore would expect a careful evaluation of its success from this broader theoretical perspective. This has not happened. Formal evaluation has been limited solely to the standardized testing of achievement. Impressionistic reports thus provide the only available evidence in the social/community domain, and only three findings of any substance can be identified (Nurcombe, 1976; de Lacey, interview, 1978):

(i) There has been very wide support for the pre-school from many sectors of the local community. Tradesmen provide services at low or no cost, goods are supplied at considerable discounts, and the Bourke Shire Council has contributed substantially to the upkeep of buildings. The threat of closure due to funding restrictions in 1977 drew a strong reaction from townspeople, with petitions, public meetings, and other practical expressions of support.

(ii) The pre-school has served an integrating function in bringing together Aboriginal and white parents in a positive working relationship, and in bringing together Aboriginal groups from the different residential sectors of the town. In this way the project has had a cohesive influence on the Bourke community, particularly during periods of ethnic unrest.

(iii) Parental support for the academic goals of the pre-school has strengthened. Parents believe the program is giving their children a better start at school, and they seem anxious that the current emphases remain. There is evidence that parents are becoming more directly involved in decision-making, especially through the local committee formed during 1978.

In summary, it appears that the project has started moving beyond its short-term goals. There are signs that the pre-school is now making a contribution to the wider community, and that members of the community (especially parents) are accepting greater responsibility for educational decision-making in the pre-school.

Finally, what has been the impact of the project outside Bourke? Within Australia it has been viewed with considerable suspicion by traditional pre-school organizations, and amongst early childhood educators there has been relatively little support for its objectives and methodology. As a consequence, there is no evidence of other pre-schools adapting the Bourke program for their own use, except at Weipa South in north Queensland where the directors of the Bourke project have served as consultants to a special Aboriginal pre-school sponsored by the mining industry there. Disinterest amongst practitioners must be blamed in part, however, upon the project directors. Whilst they have published numerous research reports in the academic literature, they have failed to write many popular accounts of the day-to-day operation of the pre-school. In particular, they have not published a detailed account of the program and its implementation, nor have they translated their research findings into a format suitable for the ordinary teacher.

On a more positive note, the pre-school now is being used for teacher education purposes, with students from several colleges and universities undertaking periods of teaching practice there. It also has attracted considerable international interest from teachers and researchers, and has received valuable support from staff of the East-West Centre, the Educational Testing Service, the University of Georgia, etc. However the Bourke project does deserve more Australian recognition for the significance of its contribution to the fields of Aboriginal education and early childhood education.

4

The New South Wales Project

The Setting

The Department of Adult Education at the University of Sydney accepted an ongoing responsibility for Aboriginal adult education in 1963, and appointed a staff tutor (Alan Duncan) to work full time in this area. Some years later, during a visit to New Zealand, he saw at first hand the Maori play centres that were developing under the guidance of Lex Grey. He was clearly impressed by the possibilities of this approach for releasing intrinsic motivation amongst Aborigines, and on his return explored ways of encouraging the development of such centres in Australia. Desmond Crowley, director of the Department of Adult Education, takes up the story:

> On another occasion, before the project began, I attended a weekend conference of Aborigines conducted by Alan Duncan; it was called to discuss possible ways of advance, and it was at this gathering that the idea of family education centres was first suggested to the Aborigines, and was received with interest. As part of an entertainment programme for the Saturday evening, Alan had brought a film of a Maori concert party: the impact of this film on the conference was electrifying. Enthralled at the sight of a dark-skinned people who gloried in their race and its culture, the Aborigines insisted that we replay the film over and over and over. Eventually, at about 2 a.m., we insisted upon going to bed. (Foreword in Grey, 1974: ii)

Lex Grey was able to visit New South Wales during March 1967 and meet with groups of Aborigines from the north coast region. Subsequently three communities announced their intention of providing educational opportunities for themselves and their children under school age along similar lines to the Maori play centres. Added stimulus was given to this resolve when Alan Duncan arranged for a group of six Maori play centre supervisors to visit the communities and talk at length with the people about the activities and objectives of the New Zealand centres. A second visit by Lex Grey later in the year further strengthened the operation of the fledgling groups. It was on this occasion that the people decided to call their venture 'Aboriginal Family Education Centres', or, to use the abbreviated form, 'AFEC'.

The potential of the AFEC movement was recognized by Desmond Crowley and his staff, and much behind-the-scenes discussion and negotiation ensued. The end result was the establishment of the New South Wales Bernard van Leer Foundation Project in January 1969. Lex Gray was persuaded to cross the Tasman to take up the position of project co-ordinator for a five-year term, and in addition to substantial van Leer funding the New South Wales Department of Child and Social Welfare, the then Commonwealth Office of Aboriginal Affairs, and the University of Sydney all made long term commitments to provide financial support.

The Objectives

In sharp contrast to the Bourke project, Lex Grey rejected completely the basic tenets of the compensatory education approach when laying the foundations of the AFEC movement. Notions of deprivation and disadvantage were anathema:

> AFEC complements and supplements family education – it is not a compensatory programme.
> AFEC accepts the values and experiences of people – it does not regard people as underprivileged.
> AFEC accepts the life style and circumstances of the people – it does not regard people as disadvantaged.
> AFEC accepts the universality of education . . . it is for all in every society – it does not regard people as deprived. (Grey 1974: 137)

The basic assumption that guided the development of the New South Wales project was the view that education begins in the family. The project therefore was based firmly on the philosophy of the New Zealand folk movement. Parents and children meeting with one another as family groups provided the basic educative and learning experiences. Parents were not so much teachers as fellow learners with each other and with their children. The fundamental task of project staff therefore was to support families and to facilitate their learning together. Resource staff themselves were not seen as teachers, but as co-learners, able to learn alongside people of all ages, parents as well as children. In particular, as Grey (1974: 161) was careful to stress, the idea of 'a teacher teaching children is foreign to the AFEC concept'.

Another assumption that Lex Grey has emphasized many times in his writings is the importance of developing the individual self-concept. The following three statements are representative of the viewpoint he has expressed:

> . . . through AFEC, families and their members can widen their focus, raise their threshold of tolerance, and release or emancipate themselves as individuals. (Grey, 1974: 14)
>
> Emphasis is placed on individual growth towards a clear, well-defined self-concept; on exploring what it means to be an Aborigine living in today's world – and not on intervention by others in the lives of Aborigines. (Grey, 1972a: 12)
>
> The project . . . aimed at supporting Aboriginal people whilst they constructed their own self-concept and accepted full, or as much as possible towards full, responsibility for what they constructed. (Grey 1974: 95)

Elsewhere Grey also speaks of the need to encourage and foster among Aboriginal people a stronger proclivity for self help, a more effective form of social cohesion, and a stronger resolve to develop their own life style.

A third assumption of central importance is that perceptual growth needs to be fostered in both parents and children. Perception is defined by Grey (1974: 33) as the ability to classify objects and materials according to their various properties (shape, size, colour, etc.). He believes that academic failure, even among well motivated Aboriginal children, has its origins in their different style of perceptual growth. Support therefore should be given to Aborigines who wish to achieve those cognitive tasks that western technology requires of them, and to achieve these tasks on a parity with non-Aborigines. In order to achieve this, Grey (1972b: 117–24) favours a carefully sequenced program that develops the child's classification systems via the manipulation of concrete materials involving visual, auditory, tactile and movement discrimination.

The self concept and perceptual growth are closely interrelated in Grey's approach. His philosophy probably is best expressed in the following statement:

> AFEC then comes to mean for people their growth perceptually . . . as a result of meeting together as a family with others . . . [This group of families] may foster, in ways that are meaningful to them, the experience, use and growth of those basic skills available to them among group members. Through the sharing of such experiences they further expand the depth and the direction of their personal, perceptual growth. Their increased growth in competence as people and as learners builds confidence and establishes a sense of worth, pride and identity. Their self-concept clarifies. They continue their search for learning and to grow in skills . . . [They are] living their way of life more fully with more understanding to themselves; and they are seeing their children grow under their care in this same way of life, yet with skills more advanced than they, their parents, have. (Grey, 1974: 153–4)

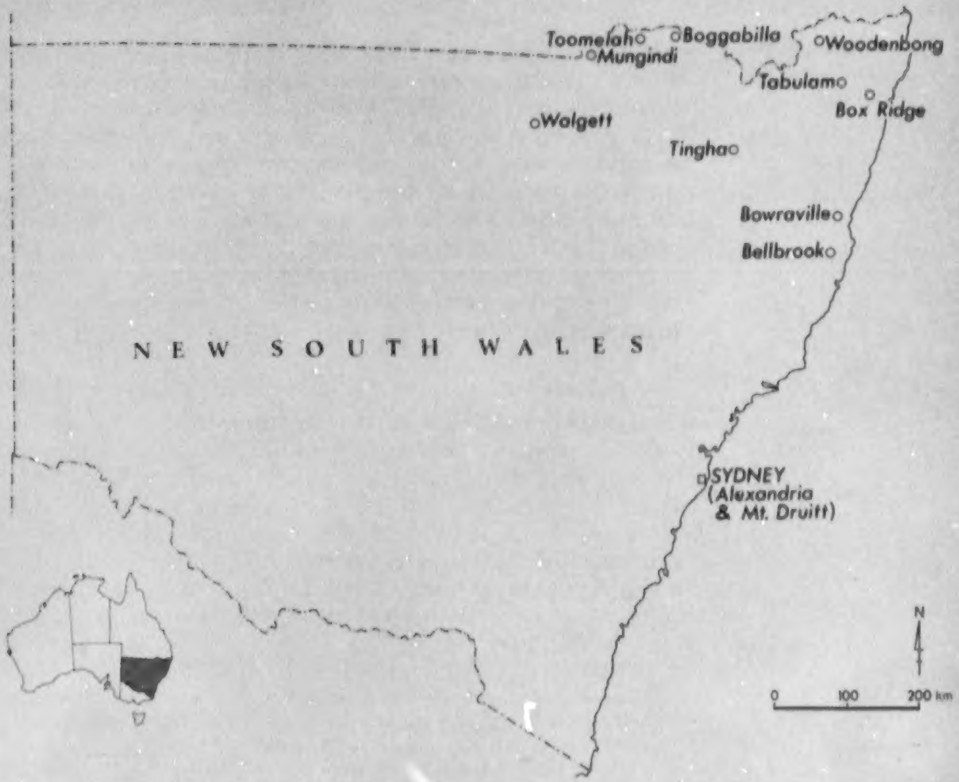

Toomelah
Boggabilla
Woodenbong
Mungindi
Tabulam
Box Ridge
Walgett
Tingha
Bowraville
Bellbrook
NEW SOUTH WALES
SYDNEY
(Alexandria
& Mt. Druitt)
N
0
100
200 km

Figure 5 New South Wales showing location of country AFECs

The six basic aims of the AFEC movement (Grey, 1974: 180–1) reflect the above philosophy:

(i) to participate in learning activities with children;

(ii) to encourage self-involvement by adults in community, family and personal concerns as these affect the Aboriginal community, family and individuals;

(iii) to open the way for more frequent parent-child interactions to occur;

(iv) to open the way for growth of understanding between parents;

(v) to open the way for self-understanding by parents;

(vi) to open the way for more adults in the community to interact.

In further commenting on the second aim, Grey (1974: 165) notes that adult responsibility was focused around five dimensions: their own children; administration of the AFEC; liaison with other AFECs; developing their crafts and languages; and becoming voluntary para-professional supervisors in the AFEC.

The above aims highlight the very broad focus of the New South Wales project. It was not concerned with early childhood education alone, but with a wide ranging program of social and community development. Nevertheless, the present review will be concerned mainly with the first and third aims; i.e. with the early childhood education components of the AFEC movement. The wider social implications of the project only will be mentioned when they appear to have influenced the provision of educative experiences for children.

The Program

It is almost impossible to distil the essence of the AFEC movement into a few pages of printed word. Even Lex Grey's lengthy and profusely illustrated final report on the project could not fully capture its ethos. Eileen Lester, an Aborigine who worked full time as an AFEC field officer for three years, came closest to expressing in written form the essential quality of the movement in a compelling paper that she read at the 1972 sociology of education conference at La Trobe University. This is illustrated in the following brief extract:

> We have had a four year taste of controlling our education centres through the family – long enough to begin to realise that we like what we have tried and to see a way ahead. No longer is there darkness or gloom at the weight of numbers of white men suppressing us. With our own voice, able to control our own education, we can see now how to be ourselves – Aborigines contributing in the ways we choose in the Australian society. (Lester, 1975: 193)

But how was this transformation achieved? To answer this question we need to go back to the beginnings of the movement and examine the basic features of an AFEC. By far the clearest statement available is contained in a small brochure that was used to publicize the movement in New South Wales. Its contents have been reproduced in full in Appendix II, and provide a clear indication of how the project was introduced to the Aboriginal people of New South Wales. As previously indicated, a nucleus of three AFECs already had been operating for eighteen months prior to the project's inauguration. With these as a foundation, the brochure subsequently was used to publicize the movement in other Aboriginal communities in New South Wales. Communication by word of mouth undoubtedly hastened further the dissemination of news about the project, and requests for information began to filter in during the early months of 1969. Project staff responded by visiting communities on invitation to discuss with the people the resources that could be made available to them. These consultations were entirely open and unpressured. Staff simply shared information, answered questions, and then withdrew. There then followed, in most cases, considerable periods of waiting while the various communities, each in its own time and in its own way, gave consideration to the implications of being involved in the movement.

Quite understandably, such an open-ended and non-directive approach resulted in a seemingly slow beginning. In fact, Lex Grey saw the first two years of the project as no more than a rolling start, during which time the Aboriginal communities were making up their minds about the credentials of the project and its staff. Nevertheless, by 1971 about 100 families were involved in the movement, and 11 AFECs had been established with a total attendance of nearly 250 children (see Figure 5). A twelfth centre was added later in the year. Peripheral to the project itself were a further nine non-Aboriginal AFECs. For administrative purposes the 12 core centres were grouped into three geographically distinct areas (northern tablelands, north coast and metropolitan), each served by a full time field officer.

One of the essential features of each AFEC was the fact that parents had total responsibility for all aspects of its functioning. The families controlled and administered their own affairs with no outside interference. A distinctive style of organization did emerge, however. Lex Grey himself has described a typical AFEC at work:

> Once a decision is made by the parents to operate an AFEC, other decisions follow as to when, where and how often to meet, and what to do. There is a range of 11 to 30 children up to the age of six present at one time in any of the eleven centres in the project, along with between 8 and 20 mothers and grandparents. A group of 3 to 5 grown-ups interact directly with the children for one third of the session which can last from 2 to 5 hours. Then they change over and interact directly with each other by discussing what the children are being, doing, learning, saying and thinking. For the section of time spent in discussion, the project has designed special observation-discussion materials. In the remaining third of their time, the grown-ups have the opportunity to consider themselves as persons. During this time they have chosen so far to design, make and repair educational equipment, develop their traditional arts and crafts, video-tape their programme, or enjoy one of several social/educational activities. (Grey, 1972a: 11)

Although strong emphasis was placed on parental decision-making, very extensive guidelines were provided for the content of the programs. This seems to be one of the anomalies of the project, for while Lex Grey claimed to be non-directive he nevertheless provided a very elaborate curriculum that in places seems unduly narrow and restrictive. Compare, for example, the assertion that the AFEC program is flexible, dynamic and self-generated (Grey, 1974: 264) with the statement that: 'Few other programmes demand a more carefully structured, sequential approach than AFEC'. (Grey, 1974: 262).

The same curriculum was used for both parents and children. Adults educated themselves by following the children's program, and by learning alongside them through very careful and detailed observations. The process for parents, then, was one of interaction with children, observation and recording of behaviour, followed by group discussion and interpretation.

Interwoven through the curriculum were three interdependent strands: growth of the self concept; perceptual development; and speech development. The first of these – growth of self concept – was considered to be the most important. The emphasis here was not on contriving special activities or situations, but on developing an awareness of how the self concept grows through the ongoing process of living and interacting with others. Nevertheless, a number of specific activities was recommended: (a) greetings and meetings; introductions and intimate face-to-face talk; (b) personal and social stories, songs and action songs – made up, said and sung, and recorded on sound or video-tape; (c) photographs, thumb prints and palm prints of the children; silhouettes outlined on paper using small stones; (d) weight and height graphs; (e) special occasions of personal interest for talk and listening, such as birthdays or the visit of a relative; (f) mirrors to talk to and in which to see oneself; (g) paintings, dough, clay and carpentry of the children noticed and talked about in ways special to them; and (h) books to take home that were made in the centre with children by parents, and around themes significant to the children. 'What was focussed on above all was the quality of the continuous personal relations among those with whom the children lived . . . Care was taken to resume the personal nature of these relations after every temporary break – the breaks that place trust of oneself and others under stress. It is trust on which the self concept feeds, imperceptibly' (Grey, 1974: 173).

The second curriculum strand was that of perceptual growth. In order to foster this aspect of development two series of basic form boards were designed. Grey (1974: 324) describes them thus:

> The boards are designed to foster visual perceptual growth of shape, size, colour, pattern, figure-ground, and to present a child with ways of attacking various problems. In each board there is but one variable that differs from another board before or after it in difficulty. All other variables are held constant. By this means a tightly graded sequence of difficulties in a range of perceptual tasks basic to reading and mathematics is available to children from six months of age to eight years and older. The attraction of the boards lies in their colour and in the self-pacing that is built in to the sequences of the board.

In view of the apparent significance of the form boards within the overall program, there are a number of baffling features regarding their use: (a) production difficulties resulted in only one set being available throughout the full five years of the project; (b) Lex Grey's admission that, 'It would be false to imply that in the time of the project the boards came to be either fully understood or adequately used. It is correct to repeat, however, that the boards remained one of the most in demand of all equipment' (Grey, 1974: 330); and (c) the lack of an adequate theoretical and/or empirical justification for selecting form boards in preference to a more broadly based perceptual-motor program of the kind being used at that time, for example, in the Bourke project.

A third important strand in the curriculum was that of speech development. Grey was highly critical of the compensatory education approach to speech and language development, and was careful to stress that within AFEC speech was promoted within the context of daily interaction. Speech was not to be isolated by allocating specific periods for instruction. Grey viewed such an approach as false and artificial, since it did not lead to the building of a self concept. Nor did he accept the notion that,

> . . . because Aboriginal adults spoke badly, with faulty grammar, and simple syntax, . . . parents were poor models for their children; and that a teacher would be needed. The project view . . . was that as parents and children spoke more and more often, so they spoke more carefully, more precisely, more clearly, and as they spoke they built more advanced speech patterns into one another imperceptibly. As they talked more precisely they noticed more, came to question, see details, formulate categories, establish classifications and properties and to conceptualise rather than verbalise. (Grey, 1974: 200–1)

Thus speech was seen as an integrated and functional aspect of the curriculum that grew from the ongoing interactions and relationships between people of all ages. Herein lies the most essential difference between the Bourke project and the AFEC movement. Whereas the former emphasized verbal bombardment by trained teachers in a special setting, the latter emphasized the natural growth of speech through its increasing use by all members of a community.

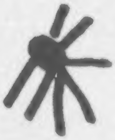
Specific guidelines for fostering children's speech have been laid down in the AFEC curriculum rationale, *My Egg, My World* (Grey, 1972b: 133–4), and a brief selection from them deserves reproduction here:

> How we talk is entirely a personal matter. Each of us has a way of talking, slowly or fast. The individual pattern is to be kept inviolate. Naturalness is a keynote, along with precision and quality. The quality or level at which one talks with children is a situational and developmental matter:

> (i) During intimate moments baby talk is encouraged as very desirable, as a language of emotion, feeling, relationship – and as a conveyor of syntax.
> (ii) During social moments patois or colloquial slang talk is encouraged as very desirable, ease and fluency of ideas is conveyed, with brief, functional nominalising.
> (iii) During interactional moments about interesting experiences a precise syntax and vocabulary, with care for grammar, are encouraged.
> (iv) During more formal occasions a carefully chosen, well-articulated speech is used.
> All four styles operate in the AFEC programme.

The content of the curriculum was transmitted to parents via several different audio-visual media which together comprised the core of the parent education program:

- Several sets of photographic slides were prepared. These depicted, at each of six stages of growth from birth to school age, children's physical development, movements, motor co-ordination, and performance at a number of different curriculum activities.
- Ten 50-minute sound tapes were made, each dealing with one of the essential features of the AFEC movement. These tapes were designed to promote discussion rather than passive audience listening.
- Discussion booklets were produced to accompany the tapes and serve as reminders and summaries of contents.
- Enlarged (30 x 45 cm) photographs of children at play were found to stimulate worthwhile discussion amongst small groups of parents.
- Large charts, similar to those which appear in *My Egg, My World*; also were used as a discussion aid, and to clarify and reinforce basic concepts.
- Parent workbooks were at the hub of the program. These provided the structure for the detailed written observations that parents were required to make. Six sequential workbooks were prepared. The first two were regarded as preliminary, and a parent who completed them gained a basic understanding of the rationale and approaches of the AFEC movement. The following four workbooks provided a more advanced level of paraprofessional training. By the end of the project, 54 parents had completed the first book, 34 the second, 21 the third and 4 the fourth. The final two workbooks had not been attempted by any Aboriginal parents.



- As companions to the first two workbooks, a series of discussion booklets was produced. Called the *Early Education Series*, they asked further questions and provided additional examples and illustrations.
- At one stage in the project finance was obtained from the Australian Council for the Arts for the purchase of videotape

equipment and the short term employment of a skilled film maker. This added yet another dimension to the program, particularly in stimulating parental observation of children.

With such an extensive program of parent education, it was essential that each AFEC should have wide support from a range of different resource people. The project co-ordinator and research assistant both made regular visits to the various centres upon invitation. Additionally, each of the three regions was served by a full time field officer. An Australian-born Sicilian was appointed to the north coast cluster when the project first commenced. Early in 1970 a tribal-born Western Australian grandmother, Eileen Lester, accepted the position of field officer to the metropolitan AFECs, having previously been employed as a social worker amongst Aboriginal people in Sydney. An appointment was not made to the northern tablelands cluster until the following year when the first of two Maori families came specifically for this purpose. All three field officer positions became vacant at the end of 1972, and all three were filled by Aboriginal appointees who had received extensive training as part of their earlier involvement as parents in the project.

The field officers visited AFECs only on invitation, and generally for only one day at a time at intervals of three to five weeks. There was one basic principle concerning all visits: the effort and responsibility for running an AFEC belonged to its members alone. Field officers were not there to do things for them, but to join with them as co-learners and share their interest, expertise and understanding. Nevertheless, Lex Grey (1974: 223) emphasized that a visit should result in Aborigines feeling more capable, more competent and more confident: 'Field officers themselves might be exhausted by the interaction when they left, but they should leave the Aboriginal community freshly strengthened.

Another significant source of support and enrichment was the extensive program of cross-cultural exchange between Maoris and Aborigines. In fact, this was one of the most exciting features of the project, and added a totally new dimension to the field of Aboriginal education. Aborigines and Maoris found an immediate and close identification with each other as members of dispossessed minority cultures, each subordinated to a dominant western society in a land where they were indigenes. The Maori people, however, had developed a much stronger pride in their own way of life and a more sustained capacity for self help. It therefore was felt that they would provide a stimulus for the Aborigines to reestablish their own identity.

Very careful attention was given to the selection of Maori personnel who visited Australia. Personal qualities such as vitality, resourcefulness, resilience, and the ability to work alongside

Figure 6 **An AFEC field officer makes a presentation to a Maori visitor in appreciation of her contribution to the New South Wales project**

Figure 7 **The chancellor of the University of Sydney congratulates an Aboriginal grandmother on the receipt of her second Letter of Acknowledgment**

people as co-learners, were considered important. First hand experience in family education was essential, as was the ability to enjoy working with children and parents. Finally, visitors to Australia were selected only if they were Maori in the sense that they spoke the language well and were familiar with traditional crafts and music.

All Maori visitors came on a voluntary basis, with payment only of their return air fare and a small living allowance. Generally they came for a period of either three or six months, although in two cases where families served as field officers they spent 12 months in New South Wales. Except in this latter situation, the role of the Maoris was to induct Australian field staff and to act as resource people to AFECs, working for a week or two at a time in each centre. In this way they were able to reinforce the basic concepts and emphases of the folk movement, as well as working intensively on the parent education program. (See Figure 6.)

Cross-cultural exchange was not a one-way process, either in terms of the benefits that accrued or the visits that took place. Maori centres undoubtedly were strengthened by the involvement of their members in the AFEC movement, while selected Aborigines gained new insights and inspiration from visiting New Zealand. Several reciprocal visits of this kind were arranged, generally for Aborigines who had completed the parent training program and been accepted for appointment as field officers.

Finally, mention should be made of occasions during the project when AFEC members came together for formally arranged meetings:

Certificate presentations: On completion of each of the preliminary workbooks the parents were presented with letters of acknowledgment, while those who completed the later workbooks received special certificates. Held at the University of Sydney, the presentations were semi-formal occasions, with the awards presented by the university chancellor. (See Figure 7.)

AFEC Advisory Council meetings: The project's Advisory Council consisted of two representatives from each AFEC, and met in Sydney once or twice each year. By the second year of the project an all-Aboriginal session took up the first day of each two-day meeting. It was from these particular meetings that tentative signs of statewide cohesion and policy-making began to emerge.

The project terminated at the end of the five-year period, although financial support continued for a further six months, during which time the Aboriginal people decided upon the direction they themselves wished to take. They agreed that the AFEC movement should continue because it provided a human approach where people worked at their own pace in an environment which was acceptable to them. Accordingly, from mid-1974, the 12 AFECs became a fully independent all-Aboriginal organization. They adopted a state-wide constitution that established them as the New South Wales AFEC Federation. Federal government funding continued, as did professional advice and support from the University of Sydney.

The AFEC Federation continued to attract annual funding from the federal government until 1978. Lex Grey served as a part-time consultant to the Federation throughout this period, his major input being the provision of training seminars in Sydney and various country centres. Government funds averaged about $70 000 per year, and were conditional upon parents in each centre providing $1 per family per week to help cover running costs. Support was provided for the original 12 AFECs only. An additional 12 centres that developed after 1974 were not officially recognized for funding purposes.

Financial support was channelled via the Australian Department of Aboriginal Affairs, and provided for basic administrative costs such as the provision and upkeep of a house in Sydney that was used as an office and for transit accommodation; the provision and running costs of two cars; the training of field officers; and the basic salaries of field officers, co-ordinator and secretary. In spite of numerous requests, money was not made available for buildings for established AFECs such as Boggabilla, Toomelah and Mt Druitt, and activities continued under adverse conditions at these places. Equipment generally was purchased from parental contributions, and AFEC members were encouraged to use environmental resources to construct their own learning materials.

The inadequacy of government support created considerable hostility and ill-feeling, and this was heightened by the apparently insensitive way that some government officials supervised the disbursement of funds, and by the ease with which other Aboriginal groups obtained support for more conventional projects. It appears, for example, that additional finance would have been readily forthcoming if the AFEC Federation had developed a more traditional pre-school approach using the services of trained teachers. Such an approach, however, is antithetical to the whole philosophy of the AFEC movement, and its apparent acceptance by government authorities as a criterion for the provision of funds led to considerable frustration amongst AFEC members. At a meeting of the AFEC Federation in March 1978, for example, delegates were very critical of government funding policies, expressing the viewpoint that support was available only on white man's terms, thus denying them the opportunity for true self-determination.

Another problem lay in the amount of time and effort that were being diverted to writing reports, justifying activities and answering questions for government officials. An inevitable consequence of government funding seemed to be the endless process of being investigated, probed and evaluated by white public servants who neither understood nor appreciated the underlying philosophy of the AFEC movement. In April 1978 members of the AFEC Federation made a momentous decision: they would rely no longer on government support. Accordingly they returned to the Australian Department of Aboriginal Affairs all unspent grant moneys, and since that time have operated as an entirely autonomous and self-directed organization. From a white perspective AFEC now appears to have finished, most outward signs of its existence having disappeared. From an Aboriginal perspective, however, it has simply gone underground to avoid manipulation, and is flourishing more strongly than ever.

There has been a significant move since 1978 from centre-based to family-based activities. Only three or four of the AFECs continue to function as such. Instead, the program is operating at a family level within the home, and therefore is less visible and more diffuse. Lex Grey (interview, 1980) believes that AFEC now has become a way of life within participating families, and is no longer seen as a program but a change of life style in relation to children. Parents thus recognize the importance of early learning, the need to provide children with a lot of attention and support, and the value of fathers accepting a significant role in child care.

Progress also has been made in other areas. Cross-cultural links have been retained, not only with the Maori people but with similar parent groups in Fiji. Several groups have been active in preparing historical descriptions of local Aboriginal communities as a means of more clearly identifying their heritage. The first of these appeared in published form at a relatively early stage in the project (Fennell and Grey, 1974), and has served as both an incentive and a model for subsequent endeavours. Considerable effort also has been expended on the preservation and teaching of indigenous languages, on the identification of language belts (geographical areas originally occupied by Aboriginal people who spoke a cluster of related dialects – at least nine belts have been identified in New South Wales), and on the development of family trees. This has enabled individual Aborigines to establish their authenticity within family and language networks, and also has provided a framework for the formation of councils of elders. All of these activities have enabled AFEC members to achieve a clearer definition of their identity as Aborigines, and to live out their Aboriginality more effectively in family and community.

The Evaluation

Conventional approaches to research and evaluation were anathema to Lex Grey. In his view the only valid form of research is that which can be of immediate and ongoing assistance to the people involved on an educative, whole-of-life basis: pure research with pre-post-test construction can do no more than look at fragments of a total situation.

In reporting on the evaluation of the New South Wales project Grey adopted a distinctive and highly individualized approach. He outlines several different forms of evaluation that were used.

The project initially was evaluated by the Aborigines themselves. Its basic philosophy and objectives were conveyed to them via discussion and cross-questioning, and the eventual acceptance of the project by the Aboriginal people indicated a positive evaluation of its potential worth to them.

Once AFECs were established, the supportive role of the project staff was continuously scrutinized by the Aborigines. This ongoing evaluation of the project by the Aboriginal participants was carefully documented and studied, and variations and compromises were made to the initial aims of the project as required.

At various times the project was evaluated by external assessors who reported on the basis of their observations of all facets of its operation, and the staff themselves provided continuous, detailed accounts of the project's operation, thus allowing their work to be constantly open for examination by anyone who cared to make their own evaluation of the project.

These evaluations of the project's mode of operation resulted in three basic developments, each of which Grey (1974: 343–4) considered to be of significance in its own way:

(i) Aboriginal people to an extensive degree – although in some communities still in ways hidden from non-Aboriginal observers – began shaping their own lives, making their own choices, and negotiating their own decisions. They did not become sufficiently powerful, however, to negotiate against an intransigently racial majority in Australian society without effective support.

(ii) A fresh hypothesis was verified, namely that for people such as Aborigines the concepts of disadvantage, deprivation, intervention and deficit learning are false premises from which to begin to operate an educational program.

(iii) Family education is a continuing, lifelong process that warrants much closer scrutiny, providing that the responsibility for that process is always with the family, and not interposed into and upon families. In concluding his discussion on the evaluation of the project, Grey (1974: 346–7) stressed the importance of self-evaluation:

> Self-evaluation by those involved in and responsible for AFEC was, therefore, regarded by the project as the only finally purposeful form of evaluation. Self-evaluation has continued extensively within the project throughout the five years. The written and taped evaluations have led to reviews of action and of policy . . . Evaluations have led to arguments, altercation, withdrawals, resignations.
>
> Despite the rigours of continuing self- and cross-examination by members, self-evaluation is regarded with ultra-caution by officials and most academics and professionals, especially officials. That objective styles of evaluation are open to the equal need for caution, and to the dual criticism of being potentially invalid and partial, is less worrisome to them than the acceptance of self-evaluation. Objective style evaluation was invalid, the project decided, because such evaluation selects one phase of a programme, isolates that, endeavours to control the variables affecting it, and measures quantitatively that one phase. The selection of the phase, though considered, is skewed, the variables are questionably isolated and questionably controlled. The measure applies to a truncated phase about which nothing meaningful can be stated until that phase is considered in relation to a functional whole.

While one cannot help but agree with the above criticisms, and while one can develop strong sympathy with Grey's overall approach to evaluation, a careful study of his final report nevertheless leaves the reader with a sense of disappointment. One feels that Grey has skirted many of the underlying issues, and that he has failed to provide a logical and coherent appraisal of the project. Regardless of one's approach, there is no excuse for loose evaluation and impressionistic reporting. 'Soft' research of the kind espoused by Grey still needs to be tight and methodical in its execution. Even self-evaluation, if properly planned and implemented, can provide objective data that can be systematically analysed and reported. Nevertheless, Grey deserves the right of reply: 'Perhaps, finally, the only valid evaluation is the one that actuates Aborigines. As they say: "Time will tell".' (Grey, 1974: 348)

The Achievements

The task of documenting the achievements of the New South Wales project is not a straightforward one. Indeed, Lex Grey and members of the AFEC movement would claim that it is impossible for outside observers – especially white observers – to make a valid appraisal. A further complication is the influence of Lex Grey himself. Unlike any of the other projects, the AFEC movement has been dominated by the personality and philosophy of one individual, and it thus bears the distinctive stamp of his approach. To understand the New South Wales project, then, one needs to appreciate the unique contribution of Lex Grey. It is clear that he is a highly individual and creative thinker, and many consider him an educationist ahead of his time. His writings are controversial, challenging the educational status quo and forcing readers to grapple with new concepts and philosophies. At a personal level Lex Grey is honest, forthright and persistent, and he has established extremely effective rapport with the Aboriginal people involved in AFEC. Brian Ross (1973: 85) has described him as

> . . . a charismatic man of intense conviction, who, through long experience, has reasoned through to a systematic and rational doctrine with great emotional appeal to members of the movement. He offers acceptance as well as wisdom. He has gained trust for himself, confidence for his methods, and faith for the future. His empathy and his understanding make possible a level of communication with the Aboriginal people that is rarely offered to white men.

It would seem, then, that Lex Grey as a person is quite inseparable from the AFEC movement, and an assessment of one inevitably involves an assessment of the other.

A further difficulty in appraising the New South Wales project is the breadth of its objectives. AFEC has sought to foster Aboriginal identity and self-determination via a program of individual, family and community development. In documenting the achievements of such a wide-ranging program it is difficult to maintain a balanced perspective. It seems that others have encountered this problem as well. On at least two occasions outside observers have been requested by government funding authorities to make an overall evaluation of the project's worth. In both cases the outcome has been relatively inconclusive. One report is confidential and the present authors do not have approval to refer to it. The other report (Ross, 1973) provides a very comprehensive and thoughtfully written review that is stongly supportive of the AFEC movement. Nevertheless, the report does reflect a feeling of uncertainty and indecision about some aspects of the project's activities. Ross found it impossible to use conventional research techniques such as testing, observation, child language analysis and structured interviews in order to obtain meaningful evidence. Even the straightforward tabulation of such data as attendance records and the number of completed workbooks proved to be a relatively fruitless exercise. In the end, Ross appears to have resorted to informal discussions with AFEC members as his basic mode of data collection. And as Ross himself commented (1973: 31):

> In most discussions a minority of senior women dominated. The groups represented those attending AFEC, which is not necessarily the whole community and in some cases is a minority.

In other words, Ross only had the opportunity to speak with the converted. The viewpoint of Aborigines who had chosen *not* to be involved in AFEC was not available. This same problem is evident in the self-evaluation espoused by Grey: the viewpoints expressed are those of the participants. No one appears to have sought the reactions of other Aboriginal groups and individuals to the AFEC movement. In particular, there is a lack of data about those Aborigines who seriously considered forming an AFEC, but chose not to do so.

In summary, then, the comments that follow must be interpreted cautiously: (a) they are made by white observers; (b) they undoubtedly are influenced by the personal charisma of Lex Grey; (c) they cannot fully do justice to such a wide ranging social movement as AFEC; and (d) they are based largely on the reports of those with a strong personal commitment to the AFEC ideology.

The most significant outcome of the New South Wales project undoubtedly has been the continuation of AFEC as an Aboriginal-controlled social movement. Since the project formally terminated in 1974 the leaders of the AFEC Federation have demonstrated their capacity to strengthen and diversify the activities of the movement, despite relatively low levels of government support and pressures to adopt a more traditional approach to early childhood education. This in itself represents a major achievement: AFEC not only has survived but appears to be growing and consolidating, setbacks and frustrations notwithstanding.

More specifically, however, what have been the outcomes of the project in relation to early childhood education?

First, groups of Aboriginal adults have assumed direct responsibility for the early education of their children from birth to the age of five years. Education has been viewed as a process of co-learning in which parents and children interact and grow in self-understanding. Such an approach contrasts sharply with the typical pattern of early childhood provisions for Aborigines whereby trained teachers work with older children (i.e. in the three to five years age group), and parents are allowed to function only in a teacher aide capacity. A totally new approach based on self-involvement by adults has been developed, and during the five-year period of the project it is estimated that approximately 250 parents and grandparents took the first steps to becoming voluntary paraprofessionals in an AFEC. From this larger group, Grey (1974: 351) believes that:

> Perhaps 25 Aboriginal adults in a total of 6 out of 12 AFECs reached the stage where they got to know and accept project staff sufficiently well to make it possible for Aborigines to take all necessary responsibility, and regard Aboriginal Family Education Centres as theirs.

This is a significant achievement in the relatively short space of five years, and the fact that this nucleus of Aboriginal people subsequently has been able to maintain its commitment to AFEC with minimal outside support demonstrates the underlying strength of the movement.

Second, it is clear that the children themselves have benefited from participation in AFEC. Ross (1973: 32), for example, has documented the following outcomes as reported by parents:

> (i) Children are enthusiastic about AFEC and eager to attend.
> (ii) Children who attend AFEC develop more rapidly and adjust to school more easily.
> (iii) Children's behaviour in the home has improved since they started to attend AFEC.
> (iv) Children are more poised; they are less restless; they are less shy with teachers when they enter school.

It has not been possible to obtain many details about the children's speech development and perceptual growth. Despite the emphasis that Grey placed on speech and perception in his formulation of the AFEC program, these aspects of development are not referred to in his analysis of project outcomes. In fact, the final chapters of the AFEC report (Grey, 1974: 335–95) make virtually no reference to the impact of AFEC on children. Even the comprehensive list of 22 project accomplishments (Grey, 1974: 358–66) omits any reference to changes in the development of children, except to report that they now attend school with increased regularity.

Elsewhere, however, Grey has claimed that substantial changes have occurred in children's responses to learning situations:

> . . . they are learning to concentrate at their play, speaking fluently and clearly, with shyness and fearfulness a thing of the past . . . They are going on to school readily. All reports from teachers are positive, except for one head teacher who complained, 'Aboriginal kids who come from AFECs talk too much'. The parents are starting to remark on the never-ending questions from the children. (Grey, 1972a: 13)

More recently, Grey (interview, 1978) has reported that a high percentage of AFEC children are succeeding in the school system, that they can read well, and that truancy is no longer a problem. This opinion has been reinforced by Ray Wallace, principal of the state school at Tingha, where one of the more successful AFECs has been in operation for a number of years. He has observed (interview, 1978) a very noticeable difference in the academic progress of those Aboriginal children who participated regularly in the AFEC program before commencing school. In fact, their language and social development is reported to be equivalent to that of their white peers. In families that have retained a commitment to AFEC the children's progress through the primary school grades generally has been maintained, and there have been minimal problems of absenteeism. Overall, Wallace has concluded that Aboriginal children who have been exposed to the AFEC program perform better at school than those who have not had the benefit of this experience.

Third, there is evidence that parents have grown in their understanding of children, and therefore have become more effective in their relationships with them. Parents also have achieved a better understanding of the purposes and process of education, and so have been providing children with more supportive and educative home environments. Parents who met with Ross (1973) reported that through AFEC they had come to understand and love their children better, they had tried to talk more with their children, and they could see their children as individuals and so had come to enjoy them more.

The role of the workbooks in achieving this attitude change amongst parents is unclear. Although considerable numbers of parents completed the two introductory workbooks, relatively few went on to the next two, and no one attempted the final two. Since the project terminated, the popularity of the workbooks has declined, despite further revision of the first two books by the Aboriginal people themselves. In retrospect, Grey (interview, 1978) believes that this style of learning was too white-oriented, and may not have been appropriate to the needs of the Aborigines. It would appear, on the other hand, that the support and guidance of field officers, including Maori personnel, had a far more significant influence on parental attitudes. The various reports on the New South Wales project suggest that field staff played a very important role in the nurture of AFEC families, and that AFECs functioned most successfully when outside support readily was available.

Summary

It is not easy to assess the overall impact of the New South Wales project at the early childhood level. Reliance has to be placed on impressionistic reporting, and bias inevitably results. Nevertheless, the present writers believe that the AFEC philosophy, particularly as it is lived out by a small nucleus of its most committed adherents, has the potential to make a very significant contribution to the early childhood education of Aboriginal children. Its positive features include the acceptance of complete responsibility by parents themselves; the inclusion of children across the full age range from birth to five years; the apparently positive effects on academic and social development when children move into the school system; better parental understanding of young children's needs; and overall enrichment of family life.

For those who argue that the above white viewpoint is invalid, the following summary comes from an Aboriginal mother who has trained as an AFEC field officer:

> For the first time in two centuries a programme has been designed to fit the needs and wants of Aboriginal people, and this, I believe, is AFEC, which is not only to benefit the small child educationally, but to benefit the adult Aborigine by bringing out awareness of himself or herself as a person and an Aborigine, awareness of the importance of education for their children who are to grow up in a much more mechanised world than the older generation did, and most important for children of today to be responsible citizens of tomorrow. (Eva Mumbler in Hickey et al., 1974: 6)

The Wider Influence

The New South Wales project also had a major impact on early childhood developments elsewhere in Australia. Its influence was felt quite strongly in most of the other projects under review, and also spread to a number of other early childhood settings, both white and Aboriginal. In retrospect, it appears that the timing of the project was most propitious. Probably by sheer chance it was initiated just prior to a wider educational movement towards greater parental involvement in the process of schooling. The AFEC movement therefore was firmly established by the time this worldwide trend started to emerge, and within Australia AFEC thus became a model for other parent-based early childhood programs such as the playgroup movement. Lex Grey (1974: 360) probably was not exaggerating when he claimed that:

> . . . the AFEC approach, both in terms of children starting in the first three years, and also parents taking responsibility, had a pronounced influence upon Australian thinking with regard to the nature of early education . . . The influence was noted in the thinking of the Kindergarten Unions . . . and the Save the Children Fund pre-schools . . . at state and federal levels.

The philosophy of the AFEC movement influenced to varying degrees the development of each of the other projects under review. The influence appears to have become stronger as time progressed, although it is difficult to separate out the impact of the New South Wales project from that of the more general trend (noted above) towards greater parental participation in education. In view of the considerable interaction that took place between staff of the various projects, and the fact that Lex Grey served as a consultant to two of them (Victoria and South Australia), it is likely that AFEC was the dominant influence. It is particularly noteworthy, however, that nowehere else in Australia was the

AFEC philosophy accepted in its true form, except perhaps at Ernabella. In almost all other situations there was an attempt to marry active parental participation with the leadership of trained teachers. In other words, although AFEC stimulated parental involvement in these settings, it was not successful in achieving parental responsibility. It seems that the essence of the AFEC philosophy – self-determination via full Aboriginal responsibility – was not acceptable to white academics and administrators in the other projects, and thus its effectiveness was diluted.

So far the present review has focused almost exclusively upon AFEC achievements at the early childhood level. It is important, finally, to stress that AFEC has been more than just an early childhood movement. In fact, AFEC appears to have had a greater impact upon adults than upon children, particularly since 1974 when it came under full Aboriginal control.

In 1973 Ross described AFEC as an incipient social movement with solutions to some of the most significant problems of the Aboriginal people. He went on to make the point that:

> Social movements succeed when they fit the needs and wants of members. Throughout Australia the problem of identity is a serious one for Aboriginal people. AFEC seeks to foster the growth of identity. Social movements gather support when they influence and become part of the identity of members. Aboriginal Australians will reap many benefits simply by being members of social movements, for they can lead to integrated communities.
>
> A great deal would be lost if anything were done to jeopardise the development of AFEC as an Aboriginal-controlled social movement. AFEC has already commenced to make an important contribution in this regard. As Aborigines continue to gain self-esteem and with it security, they will become increasingly able to make of AFEC and other educational facilities what they will. (Ross, 1973: 17, 82a)

It is clear that AFEC has become a social movement in the sense described by Ross. Committed participants are unanimous in reporting that AFEC has given them a new feeling of pride and confidence in themselves as Aborigines. It is difficult for outsiders fully to appreciate such changes in the morale and outlook of a minority group. Certainly these changes cannot be documented precisely and analysed objectively. That they have taken place, however, is indisputable. The various reports on the New South Wales project describe them in a number of different ways:

- apathy has been reduced;
- participants have a better understanding of themselves, both as people and as Aborigines;
- participants believe they are now shaping their own destinies and contributing with worth and dignity to society;
- individual adults have self-confidence to do things that they previously had never imagined themselves doing;

- the people have accepted responsibility for their own affairs;
- adults and children are more confident in social relationships, both with other Aborigines and with whites.

Over and above this, however, the people believe that AFEC has given them a new sense of their 'Aboriginality'. They now have a sense of pride in being Aborigines, and are developing stronger links with their Aboriginal heritage. AFEC, for example, has stimulated a re-emergence of indigenous languages, and selected children are being trained in their use. Other aspects of Aboriginal culture also are being strengthened, including the use of herbs and other traditional medicines, and the return to a simpler life style using natural foods and resources. These developments are taking place quietly and unobtrusively, and most white observers seem unaware of their nature or extent.

Closer links are being established with tribal Aboriginal groups in the more remote areas of Australia, and these contacts are strengthening the resolve of AFEC members to return to a life style consistent with traditional cultural values. The quest for Aboriginality also is leading to a growing involvement in the land rights issue, and it seems inevitable that AFEC members will follow other Aboriginal groups in seeking their own land, and even their own schools.

The developments outlined above have emerged more strongly since the Aboriginal people themselves assumed full responsibility for the AFEC movement, and particularly since they declined any further government support. In fact, the main focus of activity and concern now seems to be shifting from the early childhood area to the wider social and political issues involved in the struggle for identity and self-determination. This change in emphasis proves that Ross was correct in his assessment: AFEC *is* developing as a significant social movement, and progress *has* been made towards solving some of the deep-seated social problems of New South Wales Aborigines. It is imperative that AFEC be allowed to continue its quest for Aboriginality free of any external constraint and manipulation.

5

The Victorian Project

The Setting

The inception of at least four of the projects under review can be traced back to the State of Victoria, for it was there that the Monash seminar on Aboriginal education was held in 1967 under the leadership of Colin Tatz (see Chapter 2). One of the outcomes of the seminar was a decision by several groups to make submissions for funds to the Bernard van Leer Foundation, with the result that action-research projects were supported in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Queensland.

Within Victoria the Foundation funded a period of exploratory planning by Colin Tatz during 1968. The Faculty of Education at Monash University then was asked to undertake the development of an action-research project at the pre-school level, and following detailed submissions by a planning committee funding was approved for a three-year period commencing in January 1969. Support later was extended for a fourth year. Although the Foundation carried the major financial responsibility for the project, the Victorian Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs also made a significant contribution. The state Education Department provided no support, however, since at that stage it was not involved directly in the field of Aboriginal pre-school education.

A prompt start was made to the project with the appointment of Phyllis Scott, a lecturer in education at Monash University, to the half-time position of project co-ordinator. The planning committee decided to undertake work in contrasting country and metropolitan settings, and after careful investigation Swan Hill was selected as the rural community.

Approximately 400 kilometres north-west of Melbourne, Swan Hill was a thriving country town with a population at that stage of about 7000. Most Aborigines had been rehoused not long be-

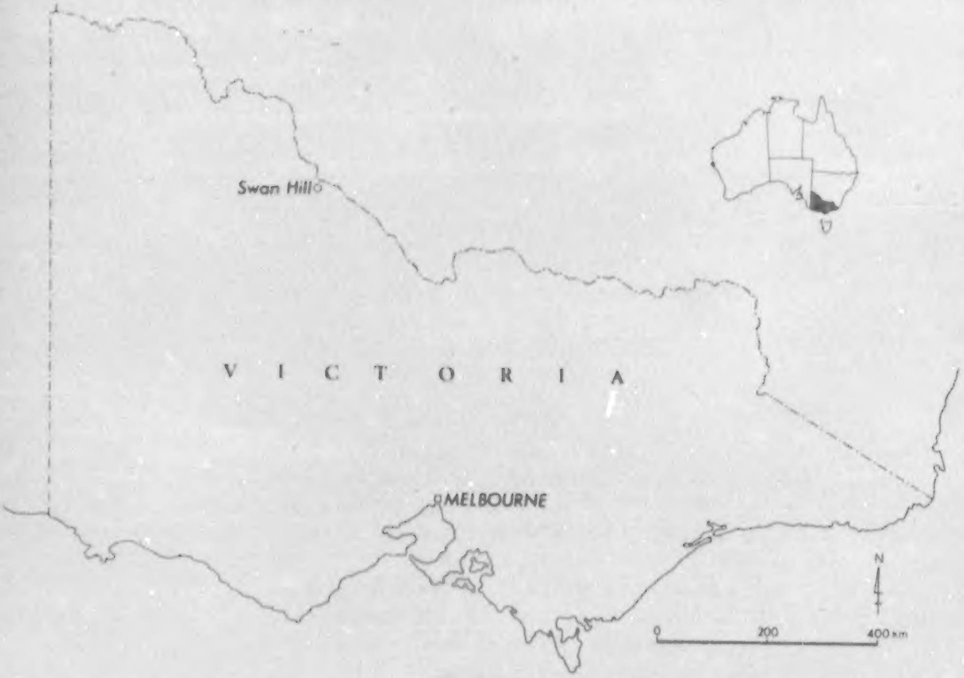


Figure 8 Victoria showing location of Melbourne and Swan Hill

forehand from tin huts on the outskirts of the town to dwellings of comparable standard to those of the white community. Their new homes were scattered throughout the residential area, rather than being clustered in a particular locality.

Only about 45 Aboriginal families were known by the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs to be living in the Melbourne metropolitan area, and since approximately one-third of these lived in a cluster of industrial suburbs to the north-west of the city this was the region selected for project involvement.

Work commenced at Swan Hill in January 1969 and with the Melbourne Aborigines in March 1970.

The Objectives

In common with several of the other projects, the basic starting points of the work in Victoria were twofold: the recognition that most Aboriginal children were not coping with the demands of the school system; and the belief that working with pre-school children and their parents in an educational program was one of the major components of a successful attack on this problem.

In formulating specific goals based on the above belief, members of the planning committee recognized that they were making two very big assumptions. There is little evidence that these assumptions even were recognized, let alone considered, by staff of the other five projects, and yet they are basic to any participation by whites in the affairs of Aborigines. The two assumptions are: that *solutions* to the problems experienced by Aborigines lie in changes in *Aborigines*; and that non-Aborigines can, *in fact*, assist with these changes. In a retrospective appraisal of the project in 1976 Phyllis Scott made the very honest statement in an interview that:

> By the time project staff were appointed, these assumptions were buried in the pressure for action. Not going back to this starting point at the official planning level now seems inexcusable . . . In planning fieldwork, however, there was an awareness of something not dealt with. As this became clearer, these underlying assumptions proved a source of considerable discomfort to field staff throughout the project.

Despite the concerns expressed above, it is clear that staff of the Victorian project approached their task with a high degree of openness and sensitivity. They saw their basic responsibility to be one of bringing university resource people and Aborigines into constructive interaction across cultural boundaries. Staff recognized that they themselves were uneducated regarding knowledge of Aboriginal needs and interests, and therefore sought frequent opportunities for listening, perceiving and learning.

Arising from this recognition of their own need to learn rather than to teach, the project staff avoided commitment to any one educational approach. They felt it was important not to predetermine even the general organization of a pre-school program, believing that this only could be devised once the particular situation had been analysed and the parents and other members of the local community consulted. Such an approach was justified in the following terms:

> It is, in fact, an accepted principle of the established field of Australian pre-school education that useful programmes of educational activity are built on actual study of the progress and needs of particular groups and individuals; on some understanding of the existing contribution of each family to the education of its children; and on awareness of the nature of the social community in which these families live. A general lack of experience in work with Aboriginal families indeed highlights the need to adhere to the principle, applying it even to the actual organisation of teacher-family contact. (Scott and Darbyshire, 1973: 2)

The above rationale highlights one of the unique features of the Victorian project – the fact that members of the planning committee did *not* seek to develop another visibly different 'type' of pre-school program, and then set out to demonstrate its value. Nor did they seek to transfer activity-oriented programs from other settings. Hence, while initially favouring the New Zealand model of Family Education Centres, they eventually decided against the establishment of even this form of organized activity. There was, then, a deliberate attempt to avoid a 'package deal' approach requiring a 'forced choice' between different kinds of programs. Instead, the focus was on the needs of particular children and their families in particular situations. The project aims reflect this rationale:

(i) to establish bridges of personal trust and communication with Aboriginal families in Victoria, in order to understand what planned educational contributions might appropriately be made to families with young children;

(ii) to develop tentative pre-school programs, which, while allowing such communication, would provide some immediate educational support and create bases for developing future work;

(iii) to define issues needing consideration in educational work with Aboriginal adults and children, and so try to develop a frame of reference which would help resolve some of the current controversy surrounding experimental pre-school programs; and

(iv) to obtain descriptive information relevant to these issues in education and psychological research.

The Program

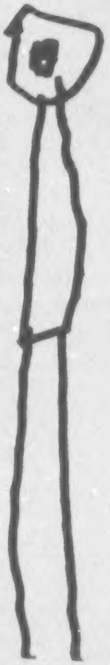
As noted above, the Victorian project commenced with no firm commitment to any one approach. The basic aim of the project was not to do something *for* Aborigines, but to find out, from working alongside them, the kinds of educative experiences they considered most appropriate for their particular situation. The project, then, was to be a learning experience for the co-ordinator and her staff, as well as for Aboriginal participants.

The situation at Swan Hill provided a convenient starting point for this kind of approach. The local Aborigines regularly used as a meeting place a building called 'Wandarrah' that had been provided by the Victorian Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs. Recreational and educational activities for adults had been developed at the centre by an education officer employed by the Ministry. A local Aboriginal Assembly had been established and held its meetings there. In addition to the education officer, several other white employees of the Ministry also were based at Wandarrah; these included a welfare officer, a health sister, and visiting social workers. Opportunity thus was provided for project staff to integrate their work with existing health, social welfare and adult education provisions.

Following a two-week visit early in 1969, the co-ordinator was able to spend one full day at the centre each week throughout the year. Her first task was to establish contact and develop positive communication. It was recognized that this would be a slow process that could not be forced in any way. There is a clear reflection of Lex Grey's philosophy in Phyllis Scott's awareness that, ' . . . our task is to invite contact, to offer resources, not to press for interaction. If this is not voluntary, and prompted by some common interest, we will have achieved nothing'. (Scott and Darbyshire, 1973: 64)

And so the project began – slowly, unobtrusively, almost hesitatingly. It was based in a single room at Wandarrah, although an outdoor play area and suitable toilet facilities were constructed later in the year. Separate two-hour morning and afternoon sessions were held on one day each week. Phyllis Scott describes her experiences in the following way:

> Over the next months, parents and children came into the setting created for informal communication, some intermittently, some regularly participating in family-style groups. Children of five down to very young babies were likely to be present. The adults bringing them changed from week to week in some families; in others mothers usually came and occasionally a father or grandfather . . . On occasions, no-one came. But usually, there were several children with two or three adults. (Scott and Darbyshire, 1973: 69)



By the end of 1969 Phyllis Scott was able to report optimistically about her initial efforts. The people had shown interest in co-operating with her in providing educational activities for their young children, and this interest had been sustained and developed during the year. It therefore was opportune to move to the next stage of the project, and at the beginning of 1970 a full-time teacher gradually took over the co-ordination of the Swan Hill program.

Attention then turned to the development of the project in the metropolitan area. A second full-time teacher was appointed in March 1970 and became directly involved in the metropolitan work from its inception. In contrast to Swan Hill there was no established group activity evident among the Aboriginal families in Melbourne, and the extent of any type of contact between them was unknown. Furthermore, families were scattered across a number of different suburbs, and it was not feasible to plan a program around a central meeting place. The selected region lacked adequate pre-school services, and it was established that Aborigines were not making use of those that were available. A home visiting program appeared to be the most feasible way of initiating work. Contacts therefore were made on an individual basis with each of the 14 known families in the region.

The approach to each family was low-key and informal: a brief explanation by the co-ordinator; an enquiry about the family's interest in being involved; an invitation out to the car to meet the teacher; and an attempt to arrange for the teacher to call back at a mutually convenient time. Phyllis Scott continues the story:

> Once again, the primary purpose was to identify needs and develop positive communication before institutionalising any particular forms of activity for either children or adults . . . Almost all families wished to participate. Neighbouring children from white families also were invited to join in. Over two years, 22 Aboriginal families and 45 of their children have been enrolled, and a further 9 non-Aboriginal children. The maximum teaching load has been found to consist of three to four home visits daily, or other equivalent teaching sessions elsewhere. (Scott and Darbyshire, 1972: 4–5)

Four overriding emphases were accepted in the ongoing operation of the teaching program (Scott and Darbyshire, 1973: 78):

> (i) educational concern for all young children, regardless of their ethnic origin;
> (ii) recognition of the particular position of Aboriginal families in the general Australian community at present, and interest in supporting their efforts to cope with a social and physical environment which held sources of practical and psychological stress, and to build a more secure family setting for the future;
> (iii) respect for parents' existing beliefs, values, and preferences for ways of dealing with young children; and
> (iv) an absolute acceptance of the parents' right to control what happens in their own homes, and concern to arrange teaching sessions so that both parents' and children's immediate needs were considered.

Meanwhile at Swan Hill the teacher was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the larger family-type play group that had been started in 1969. This form of group activity had served a useful purpose in making initial contacts, but it did not provide an adequate setting for sustained sequences of teacher-child interaction that would help children to build up learning behaviour and cognitive skills. In order to provide greater flexibility the teacher adopted the more intensive and highly individualized approach of the metropolitan program. In this way the home-based teaching sessions formed the nucleus of the program in both centres for the remainder of the project. As Phyllis Scott observed, this form of educational activity has several advantages over group learning situations:

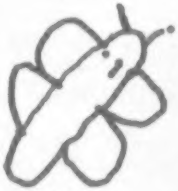
> As an observing and modelling situation for either children or parents, home teaching sessions allow a sufficiently salient adult model for effective results. There are less competing stimuli. Some mothers have made direct comments

> which indicate awareness of how the teacher talked to the children, asked them questions or gave correct words for objects; this has been followed by attempts to do likewise. Teachers also have observed signs of observational learning – such as a mother adopting some of the teacher's techniques or protecting the constructive activity of an older child from destruction by a younger brother. Awareness that this might matter, and why, indicated change in the adult concerned. (Scott and Darbyshire, 1973: 169)

A general procedure for the teaching sessions soon became established. The normal duration was about one hour, although sessions were shortened for younger children or when some practical crisis arose in the home. They involved either a single child, two or three children from the same family, or a similar-aged child from a neighbouring family where the parents knew each other and agreed to co-operate in this way. The basic emphasis was on planned teaching sessions for the children and informal learning opportunities for their parents. Thus it was understood that the mother (or a substitute relative) would be at home during the teacher's visit and was invited, although not required, to attend the session. Most mothers spent at least part of the hour either watching or participating.

Both teachers worked from station wagons which were without official identification in order to keep them relatively unobtrusive. Visits were made to each home once or twice each week. Equipment included some of the more portable materials usually found in pre-school centres. It was found unnecessary to accumulate the large supply of equipment normally required when working with young children in a group setting. In fact, Scott and Darbyshire (1973: 171) emphasized that the real world in and around the home, together with the human resources that the teachers themselves represented, were by far the most important ingredients in the teaching situation. (See Figures 9 and 10.)

Several variations to the general teaching pattern developed in response to specific needs. In some cases it was not always practicable to work in the home, and so the teacher took the children for walks, visiting local parks, shopping centres and other community facilities. At other times the station wagon was used for such excursions. These outings were carefully structured to maximize their educational value to the individual child. On some occasions the parents also were involved in order to sensitize them to things that particularly interested the children, ways of talking effectively with children about these things, and conditions under which these outings can be enjoyable for all concerned.



It was found that some of the older children responded better in a group situation, and at Swan Hill a room at Wandarrah was used for teaching purposes with small groups of children once or twice weekly from time to time. Although similar facilities were needed

Figure 9 **Children engage in learning activities in the loungeroom of their home**

Figure 10 **Library books are exchanged at the end of a home visit**

for metropolitan children, no suitable base could be found. However in both settings some of the older children were catered for through attendance at regular pre-school programs, and communication between the respective teachers was established.

As the project progressed, many of the families were found to have problems in using community services which their children urgently needed. In such situations the teacher was careful not to take over the responsibility herself, but to use the problem as an opportunity for educating parents in the use of community provisions. Thus her contribution usually consisted of making a definite statement about the importance of doing something for the sake of the child; indicating that some action was expected from the parents; providing information about what was involved, and how the children might react; offering to accompany the parents concerned, both for personal support and to explain any necessary procedures; suggesting a deadline for a decision; and offering practical help with transport.

Although staff of the project had stressed from the outset that they were not seeking to evolve another visibly different type of pre-school program, it is noteworthy that they were successful in developing a unique approach to the early childhood education of Aborigines, and one that offered scope for effective replication elsewhere. One of its important features was the fact that the activities could be carried out with minimal physical resources. In dealing with the needs that were uncovered it was clear that a full-scale pre-school centre was neither essential nor even necessarily helpful. As Scott and Darbyshire (1973: 178) point out, 'The most expensive and necessary resources for teaching of this nature are those provided by experienced teachers who can make their time readily available to assist individuals to new levels of independence'.

In developing a program based on the provision of relatively unobtrusive human resources, the project staff became almost too low-key and unpretentious in their approach. They tended to operate quietly and in relative isolation from other early childhood educators, so much so that some observers criticized them for being secretive about what they were doing. Certainly a retrospective appraisal suggests that they did not communicate very effectively with others about their work, nor did they seem anxious to collaborate with the Victorian Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs in order to ensure continuity of the program after 1972. Thus, when funding terminated, the project lapsed completely. One of the project's main strengths therefore became its downfall, for by its very unobtrusiveness it failed to attract the positive publicity and involvement that would have predisposed government authorities to provide further support.

The Evaluation

Evaluation played an almost disproportionately important role in the Victorian project. It will be recalled that one of the four original aims was to obtain 'descriptive information relevant to issues needing consideration in educational and psychological research with part-Aboriginal adults and children'. This was achieved by a very extensive program of standardized testing using no fewer than six major instruments: the Binet Scale (1960 revision), the Leiter International Performance Scale (1948 revision), the Bayley Scale of Mental Development, the PPVT, selected subtests of the revised ITPA, and the research edition of the Assessment of Children's Language Comprehension. Testing was supplemented by detailed analyses of observational records made by the teachers, particular attention being given to the children's learning behaviours and attitudes. Finally, a follow-up questionnaire was completed by classroom teachers once the children had moved on to regular primary (elementary) schooling. Questions were directed to three areas of interest: (a) the teacher's perception of children's progress in basic academic skills; (b) children's social behaviour with peers and adults; and (c) manifestations of learning behaviours and attitudes which the pre-school program had attempted to establish and/or reinforce. No systematic attempt seems to have been made to assess parental attitudes and perceptions at any stage during the project, the entire focus being on the development of the child.

Despite the stress placed on assessment, the tests and observations were not designed as part of an overall research plan for the purpose of evaluating the project. Rather, the aim was simply to obtain descriptive data on each child's progress. Scott and Darbyshire (1973: 191) outline their approach in the following way:

> [The project] . . . was not designed to isolate programme variables in a pre- and post-test experimental design, nor to contrast results with those of a control group. The testing programme primarily provided descriptive information which helped in deciding teaching priorities, and gave some indication of levels of performance at different time points in a continuing sequence of learning in individuals.

In view of the above rationale there seems little point here in elaborating on the outcomes of the evaluation, since it apparently was directed solely at helping particular children in particular situations, and was not intended to be generalizable elsewhere. However the authors do provide in their report a chapter dealing with evidence of change in the children participating in the project, albeit carefully prefaced by the following remarks:

> The information . . . is not, then, claimed to demonstrate effects from specific teaching procedures, nor to serve as the primary basis for evaluating this project. However adequate education programmes may be, learning in children – or the lack of it – is the consequence of a total set of interactions between a unique individual and the structure of his own particular environment. The privilege of teaching does not, in our opinion, allow one to place set expectations on what a person *should* have learned in a given time, and to judge his progress in a comparative context. Neither teacher nor learner is in a position of such omnipotence.
>
> What can be expected from either is some serious, sustained effort to provide or to use, to the best of existing abilities, what positive conditions for learning can be created in a particular set of circumstances. The differences in home environments and in personal characteristics with which one child or another in our programme had to deal, during the time between tests, were dramatic . . .
>
> Data . . . therefore are useful as a basis for planning further work with particular children, and for dealing with matters of continuity in learning. One must think out how to build on what *has* been achieved. This position is in contrast to that which uses such data to make judgements about what should have been achieved, or possibly what could have been achieved. (Scott and Darbyshire, 1973: 191)

Despite the cautious note sounded in the above commentary, the authors have provided some data relating to the project's effectiveness. In particular, they have reported statistically significant changes in scaled scores across both the Swan Hill and the metropolitan programs on all test instruments. Scott and Darbyshire (1973: 193–4) comment on this finding:

(i) Since care was taken to discard any pre-test data that were artificially depressed by a child's inability to cope with the test situation itself, and since pre-testing was delayed in one program, the results are considered likely to be an underestimate of the total change in children occurring during the period between tests.

(ii) Gains were not limited to children whose comparative starting point was either particularly above or below the usual expectations, nor to one program or the other.

(iii) For just a few children the picture was one of regression due to diverse problems in both family and child. Such problems would only be expected to yield to highly specialized remedial treatment of a kind not available in the present program.

(iv) Exactly what the change scores are measuring is likely to be multi-dimensional, and inclusive of other areas of learning than just the cognitive. Changes of the magnitude reported for the present project are thus likely to represent positive and significant contributions of some kind or another to the children's overall developmental progress.

(v) No claim is made that teaching efforts within program sessions were entirely responsible for the results, nor that certain teaching procedures had specific effects. Rather, the results apparently accrued from the overall, collective changes associated with the introduction of the persons and activities involved in the pre-school programs.

(vi) The varying rates of progress of individual children draw attention to the dangers of basing one's teaching approaches on group results. The data highlight, in other words, the need to protect the individually-oriented approach of the present project.

(vii) Finally, to the extent that higher scores on standardized tests of intelligence represent positive educational change, the data do indicate that the children enrolled in the program not only made progress, but made accelerated gains.

The analyses of the teachers' observational records and the follow-up questionnaires were used for descriptive purposes only. Since they add nothing to the evaluation of the project's effectiveness they need not be considered further here.

Insofar as Scott and Darbyshire's approach to evaluation allows, it seems appropriate to conclude that the Victorian project achieved considerable success in terms of the children's cognitive development. Impressive gains were made by most children on a number of different measures, and the authors clearly were not exaggerating when they concluded that:

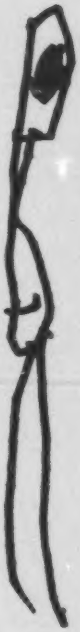
> It can be said . . . that the programmes created conditions conducive to efforts to learn in children; and that the data reflect . . . the ability of the teachers concerned to introduce into highly unstable early environments, conditions which increased the children's chances of more optimum development. (Scott and Darbyshire, 1973: 191)

The Achievements

In terms of observable outcomes it appears that relatively little was achieved by the Victorian project. The only positive effects seem to have been the benefits accruing to the particular children and parents who participated in the programs at Swan Hill and north-west Melbourne between 1970 and 1972. And even these benefits are difficult to identify precisely.

As previously noted, the project was successful in promoting the children's cognitive development. These improvements in intellectual functioning seem to have been relatively short-lived, however. Discussions held with teachers in Swan Hill during 1978 indicated that the project had made little apparent difference to the achievement levels of the children as they progressed through the primary school. On the other hand the teachers reported that children had been better prepared for initial school entry – they socialized more effectively with other children, they were much less shy in their relationships with teachers, and they took part more fluently in classroom discussions. Parental contact with the school also had been enhanced, and teachers felt that mothers had a better attitude towards the education of their children. The director of the Swan Hill pre-school also commented positively on the effects of the project. A considerably higher proportion of four-year-old Aboriginal children had been attending pre-school since 1971, attendance had been more regular, better relationships had been established with mothers, and teachers had become more sensitive to the needs of individual children.

In summary, all of the people interviewed in Swan Hill, both Aboriginal and white, agreed that the project had been most worthwhile in terms of the support given to parents and the degree to which children were helped to socialize more effectively. They were unanimous in expressing regret that the project had not been followed up in any way. They believed the project had been needed in the town, and that it should not have been terminated in the way it was. (In fact, several people commented that many Aboriginal parents and children still needed help and support of the kind offered by the project.) Unfortunately the final report on the project had virtually no impact on local educators and welfare workers when it reached Swan Hill late in 1973. It was not widely read, nor does any action appear to have resulted from it.



It was not possible for the present writers to make an appraisal of the project's outcomes in north-west Melbourne. Unfortunately no one seems to have maintained any systematic contact with participating families, and their current whereabouts are not known. Similarly no records were kept of children's primary school enrolments, and so their levels of school achievement could not be investigated. The longer-term effects of the project in Melbourne therefore are completely unknown.

The wider impact of the project also has been difficult to assess. Despite careful investigation, the present writers can find no evidence of the project influencing other pre-school programs in Victoria, nor elsewhere in Australia. The final report apparently attracted little interest, and most of the early childhood educators interviewed in Victoria admitted that they had not read it in full because of its length and complexity. The outcomes of the project therefore received scant publicity, and even a collection of papers from a major seminar on Aboriginal pre-school education held in Melbourne during October 1973 (i.e. in the month following release of the final report) does not include a contribution from staff of the Victorian project (Victorian Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, 1973).

It probably is unfair, however, to judge the Victorian project using criteria such as observable outcomes and impact on other programs, for project staff had never intended to develop a particular type of activity that was generalizable to other contexts. In contrast to the other projects, staff deliberately adopted a more reflective stance, taking a lot less for granted to begin with. The aims of the project reflected this introspective approach, for they stressed the need to define issues, establish priorities, and develop appropriate philosophies. To what extent were these underlying aims of the project realized? A careful analysis of the final section of the Victorian report (Scott and Darbyshire, 1973: 232–55) indicates that considerable success was achieved at the more abstract, theoretical level. In particular, the report made several basic recommendations which, if adopted, would revolutionize the provision of early childhood services to many Aboriginal families in Australia. The most significant of these recommendations are summarized below.

(i) The most obvious source of educational problems is not the formal learning environment of the home, but the absence of basic conditions needed to support general child development. Attempts to rectify children's problems by teaching parents specific child-rearing skills therefore are inappropriate. Instead, families require interdisciplinary professional support in order to create and sustain the basic prerequisites for learning and development.

(ii) Professional support should be planned and co-ordinated from the viewpoint of those in need of assistance, with emphasis on the nature and content of communication at the local level. Centralized administration of support by separate government welfare agencies (e.g. health, housing, education, social work) is counterproductive to the solution of underlying problems.

(iii) Parents cannot become effectively involved in planning and organizing educational experiences for their children until they themselves have achieved a sense of mastery over their own lives. Educators therefore should focus initially on adult learning, with the aim of helping parents to extend their own cognitive skills and general knowledge. In this way parents will experience the meaning of education for their own lives, and so will be able to act with more awareness, knowledge and understanding of the consequences for themselves and others.

(iv) In approaching educational work with adult Aborigines, it must be recognized that learning and teaching are matters of human communication and experience. The development of special activities such as parent education courses is likely to hamper effective learning, and make participants feel even more inadequate. Sustained informal communication at a personal level is the most appropriate method of teaching. This communication should focus on the *process* of managing problems of immediate concern to parents, thus creating a feeling of personal involvement and increased confidence in dealing with experience.

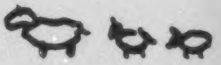
(v) The value of giving high priority to pre-school work with Aboriginal children needs to be questioned seriously. In many situations the major educational effort should be focused on the *origins* of learning problems, rather than their symptoms in children's levels of cognitive development.

(vi) The above suggests that pre-school activities might best be introduced as part of a comprehensive approach to helping Aboriginal families with multiple problems, rather than being initiated separately from within the field of early childhood education. Ideally, pre-school teachers should be participants in small, local planning groups that are in a position to understand the immediate problems of particular families and to plan a co-ordinated sequence of field work in consultation with these families and others in the community.

In summary, Scott and Darbyshire (1973: 255) believe that Aboriginal pre-school programs should place special emphasis:

- on the nature and content of communication, rather than on the organization of activities and control of facilities and resources;
- on opportunities to increase ability to control one's experience and to understand the meaning of education in this sense;
- on creating home conditions which sustain educational processes rather than on learning how to 'teach' children;
- on continuity of personal-professional contact with families;
- on adult-child rather than peer group interaction;
- on recognizing the range of cultural and educational differences between Aboriginal Australians;
- on removing the separating label of 'disadvantaged', and the reasons for it; and
- on educational communication and behavioural freedom.

It is clear from the above recommendations that staff of the Victorian project did deal seriously with a number of important issues relating to the early education of Aboriginal children. In this way they achieved their underlying aims, as well as contributing to the development of the parents and children who participated in the project. It is unfortunate, however, that these less tangible outcomes were not communicated effectively. A shorter and more precise report, together with appropriate follow-up publicity, might have resulted in much wider discussion and debate on the recommendations arising from the project. Certainly the issues raised in the final two chapters of the report deserve far more careful consideration than they have received up until now.



Finally, despite the success of the Victorian project in achieving its underlying aims, one cannot help questioning the ethics of totally withdrawing from a situation of human need without making any provision for the continuing support of the people involved. The relatively sudden termination of the project clearly was not in the best interests of the Aboriginal families who participated, and there should at least have been a period of slow phasing out, preferably coupled with arrangements for continuity of support by other community agencies.

6

The South Australian Project

The Setting

During the mid 1960s, staff of the various government departments associated with Aboriginal welfare in South Australia were becoming increasingly concerned at their lack of progress in dealing with the educational and social needs of Aborigines. Despite the inevitable departmental rivalries they were prepared to work together on any project that held promise of achieving a breakthrough. At about this time Jim Richardson was appointed foundation professor of education at the newly established Flinders University. Having a strong interest in the teaching of underprivileged and handicapped children, he soon sensed the need for a different approach to the education of Aborigines in South Australia, and during 1968 obtained preliminary funding from the Bernard van Leer Foundation for an action-research project at the pre-school level. Max Hart, a teachers college lecturer in Aboriginal studies, was seconded from the state Education Department for appointment as half-time project co-ordinator. By early 1969 a state-wide survey of pre-school facilities for Aboriginal children had been completed, and visits made to Victoria and New South Wales in order to consult with Colin Tatz, Alan Duncan and Lex Grey, and to observe at first hand the work of the three north-coast AFECs.

The foundations of the project were developed in close association with other interested groups, particularly the state Education Department, the state Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Kindergarten Union. An advisory committee which included senior representatives from all of these agencies was established to examine the results of the survey into pre-school needs. The committee decided to use the funds available to establish two pre-schools in contrasting settings in remote areas of the State. The choice was made because:

(i) Compared with most other States, a higher proportion of Aborigines in South Australia still lived in tribal settings, retaining in large measure their traditional languages and life style. A unique opportunity thus was provided for work to be carried out amongst these people.

(ii) Because of the lack of satisfactory research data, the state Education Department was finding it more difficult to meet the needs of Aboriginal children attending school in remote areas than in other parts of the State.

(iii) The work which was envisaged was complementary to, and did not overlap in great measure, the projects being planned for the other States.

Hence the committee's first selection was Ernabella, a community at that time administered by the Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions for approximately 200 members of the Pitjantjatjara tribe. It is attractively located in the Musgrave Ranges in the far north-west of the State, almost 1700 kilometres from Adelaide and adjacent to the Northern Territory border. The children attend a state government school where early instruction is in the vernacular, with English introduced later as a second language.

With an optimism not shared by some who had lived and worked there, the committee's second selection was Marree, a township located some 650 kilometres north of Adelaide. Tineke de Vries, who later worked as a research assistant at Flinders University and assisted with the follow-up review of the project, has written an especially graphic, yet accurate, commentary on this unique community:

> The name Marree is synonymous with hardship frustration and challenge . . . [It] is characteristic of most railway towns in the Australian outback. Stark rows of depressingly similar prefabricated houses bordering the railway line are broken only by a few hardy trees. The wide, unsealed roads in the town provide thick clouds of dust, . . . or else become quagmires of clay when the spasmodic rains fall.
>
> To the city eye, it seems that the aridity of the landscape and the harshness of the climate have relentlessly penetrated Marree, leading to the drabness of its buildings, the slower life-style and the stillness so typical of isolation.
>
> Of Marree's population of four hundred, approximately forty per cent are European, being either transient railway and highway workers or professional and community workers (e.g. school teachers, policemen, nurses, etc.). The remaining population of mixed Aboriginal, European and Afghan* descent finds employment mainly on the railways. Socially, Marree is much-

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*Between 1860 and 1920 many thousands of camels were brought to Australia for transport purposes in outback areas. Considerable numbers of handlers also were recruited, the majority from India and West Pakistan, although a few originated from Afghanistan, Persia, Egypt and Turkey. Although the term 'Afghan' has been used to describe the handlers and their descendants, it is clearly a misnomer in most cases.

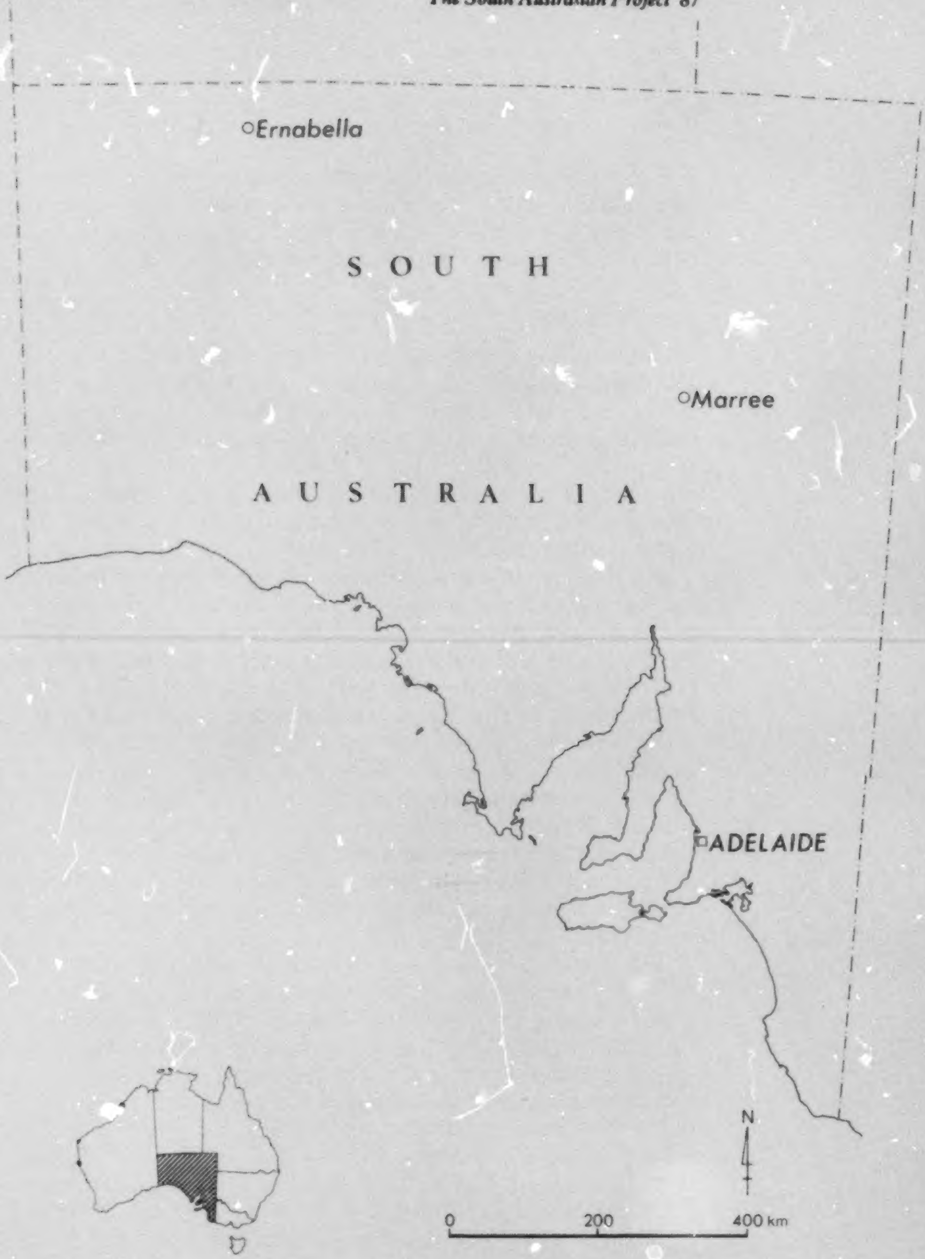
Ernabella
SOUTH
AUSTRALIA
Marree
ADELAIDE
N
0
200
400 km

Figure 11 South Australia showing location of Marree and Ernabella

> fragmented, for each of these groups considers itself to be different from the others. The consequent existence of social hierarchies and community divisions must be a major factor for consideration on the part of outside community developers. (de Vries et al., 1974: 2–5)

After numerous delays, generally occasioned by the difficulty of establishing effective communication over such long distances, pre-school programs eventually were started at Ernabella in February 1970, and at Marree in May of the same year.

The Objectives

In contrast to the cautious and even hesitant approach of his Victorian colleagues (see Chapter 5), Jim Richardson was quite direct: the main task of the South Australian project was to establish experimental pre-schools. No other form of educational activity was considered. It was planned that conventional pre-school facilities be provided, thus allowing a smooth take-over of staff and buildings by the appropriate state authority upon completion of the project.

Jim Richardson was equally direct when it came to specifying the rationale of the project: it was to be based firmly on the compensatory education model. The original submission to the Bernard van Leer Foundation, in fact, reflects much of the ethnocentrism and misguided optimism of the North American literature of the time. Thus the submission speaks of the need to break down the vicious and self-perpetuating cycle of cultural deprivation by providing carefully devised pre-school experiences that have been designed: (a) to close the ability and experimental gap which exists between culturally deprived children and white middle class children at the commencement of regular schooling; and (b) through related work in the community and particularly with parents, to change adverse attitudes and motivation to school and education.

The bluntness of this early approach was softened as time went by. Two factors in particular led to a change in emphasis away from a purely compensatory approach. First, the decision to broaden the perspective of the project by working with tribal people led to a deepening awareness of the rich cultural heritage of the Aborigines, and thus to a clearer recognition that the notion of deprivation may be quite inappropriate in some situations. The second mellowing influence on the project was the AFEC movement. Consultations with Lex Grey and observation of the first New South Wales centres led to a growing emphasis in the two South Australian pre-schools on parental involvement. The folk movement philosophy, however, did not replace the compensatory approach, but simply coexisted alongside it. Since the two are in many ways antithetical this led to an unresolvable tension within the project This is reflected in the objectives that eventually were spelled out:

(i) to develop the intellectual abilities of Aboriginal children and thus prepare them for more effective entry into the formal school setting;

(ii) to contribute to the physical, social and emotional development of the children;

(iii) to develop more favourable parental and community attitudes towards education; and

(iv) to involve parents in the running of the centres and thereby develop in them a greater awareness of the physical, mental and social needs of the pre-school child.

In elaborating upon these aims, Richardson et al. (1970: 5) commented as follows:

> At Marree, the aims are relatively uncomplicated. The future of the children can be viewed only in the context of a white Australian culture (though it is expected that the Aborigines will retain their own identity and contribute to the Australian culture). The aims are concentrated simply on offsetting the severe disadvantages in which they are placed in relation to this culture. At Ernabella . . . the position is different. Here the original tribal culture and language survive. It has values which it would be presumptuous to 'write off', explicitly or implicitly, in an educational programme. Whilst the above-mentioned aims are still valid there must be added that of . . .

(v) to encourage an awareness of, and develop a pride in, Aboriginal traditions and cultural achievements.

These aims were to be achieved through broadly based pre-school programs especially devised to take account of the conditions in the two communities. Parental education was seen to be of equal importance to the education of the child:

> In fact, it appeared futile to contemplate the latter without the former. Hence the adoption at both centres of the broad family education approach, aiming to give Aboriginal parents direct responsibilities in the education of their pre-school children – to encourage them to observe, record, become aware and attempt to reinforce in the home what was being done in the centre. (Richardson et al., 1970: 6)

Despite this emphasis on parent education, the basic AFEC philosophy was only partially accepted, and during the early months of the project continuing attempts were made to rationalize some of the differences between the two approaches.

The Program

Staff of the South Australian project set themselves a well nigh impossible task – that of establishing experimental pre-schools in two of the most remote communities in the State and having them fully operational within a two-year period. In addition, they were seeking to involve parents in the activities of both centres, despite the fact that no real interest had been expressed by the Aborigines themselves. Furthermore, neither community initially had adequate buildings that could be used as pre-school centres. Hence both pre-schools commenced with makeshift accommodation arrangements and the promise of federal government funding for new facilities. Nor could accommodation be provided for a teacher at Ernabella, thus necessitating the recruitment and on-the-job training of the wife of one of the white mission staff who had had some previous teaching experience. Finally, it proved almost impossible to obtain suitable field staff who were willing to live and work at Marree. Although none of these obstacles eventually proved to be insuperable, they did lead to numerous delays, especially during the early months of the project, thus making it impossible to bring the work to a satisfactory stage of completion in the time available.

Pre-school activities were initiated at both centres during the first half of 1970, and with the project scheduled for completion by the end of 1971 it thus became the shortest of all six of the projects, at least as measured by the duration of actual field work. February 1970 saw the beginning of the program at Ernabella, the children and parents meeting each morning on a patch of lawn adjacent to the home of the teacher. During the cooler winter months, however, they moved from the open air into a temporary galvanized shed that provided some warmth and shelter. Despite these difficulties, the average daily attendance of children at the pre-school during 1970 was 20. Since all of the mothers were employed each day at the mission craft centre in painting, spinning, weaving, rug-making and other craft activities, it was necessary to arrange with mission staff to have two mothers rostered each day to assist with the pre-school.

Work on the new building commenced in May 1970 on a site chosen by the Aboriginal people. A conventional design was used, similar to that of most white pre-schools in the State. The bricks were made by some of the fathers and construction was undertaken by a team of Aboriginal men working under the supervision of a white builder. The task thus became an adult education project in its own right, with on-the-job instruction in the various skills of bricklaying, window framing, roofing, plumbing, concreting, etc. Use of local labour inevitably slowed the rate of construction, and it was not until the beginning of 1971 that the building was ready for occupation. The advantages of this mode of construction, however, far outweighed the effects of any delays: it had been an invaluable learning experience for the men con-

cerned, while the Aborigines now saw it as their own pre-school that they themselves had built.

Following visits to Ernabella in the middle of 1970 by Lex Grey and one of the Maori field workers from New South Wales, work was commenced on the translation of the first of the AFEC parent workbooks into Pitjantjatjara. A sequential program of activities also was developed for the children, special emphasis being placed on pre-number concepts, following preliminary testing with a Pitjantjatjara translation of the Caldwell Pre-school Inventory which showed 'deficiencies' in this area. The program was built around eight areas in which parents could work with their children: indoor play, music, stories, group activities, classification and sorting, excursions, outdoor group activities, and outdoor games. It was stressed that:

(i) The parents should not only make the necessary equipment and show the children how to play with it, but also should talk about the children's responses as they used the equipment. In this way the child could hear the parent talking about the colour, length, size, shape or other properties of the material and learn from the conversation.

(ii) The parents were encouraged to introduce new ideas slowly. Play should be directed into discussions about the properties of the blocks or stones or measures used. Pitjantjatjara words and symbols might be written down but not taught formally.

(iii) The child should be allowed to play in the way he/she enjoyed most. There would be times when all the children might come together for a story and a song, but generally the interest of the children would dictate what they are going to do.

(iv) There was a balance between group activities and free activities, between outdoor and indoor play, and all were centred around the parents – their preparation of interesting activities and their ability to help the children learn through these activities. (Richardson et al., 1970: Appendix B, p.1)

It was not until the end of May 1970 that the pre-school at Marree got under way, and even then it had a hesitant and rather uncertain beginning. The only available venue was the local community hall, an unlined galvanized iron structure in somewhat dilapidated condition. Considerable difficulty had been encountered in recruiting a suitable teacher, and the eventual appointee had only limited experience in working at the pre-school level, and with Aboriginal people. Attendance varied considerably during the early months, ranging from 2 to 15 children, with an average daily attendance of 10. Parents generally were unresponsive to the overtures of the white teacher who visited each family a number of times in an effort to promote their interest and involvement. Eight mothers attended on at least one occasion, although only three became actively involved on a regular basis. Part of the difficulty was the existence of different social groups amongst the Aboriginal and Afghan people, so that if certain families participated in an activity then other families were unwilling to do so.

As at Ernabella, a teaching program was developed at Marree for use with the children. The introduction to the program (Richardson et al., 1970, Appendix A, p.1) provides a concise summary of its salient features:

> The following programme is intended as a *guide* for activities in the pre-school, rather than as a prescribed syllabus. Formal instruction is not envisaged. Instead, as children become interested and ready for the activities, more directive teaching will be employed. The basic aim of the activities is to provide a stimulating environment in which the children can learn.
>
> Although the programme is essentially an informal one, it is intended to provide a coherent framework of sequential activities. A thematic approach has been employed, incorporating language and number activities, fine motor co-ordination skills, and health and hygiene practices. By using a co-ordinated theme for these areas of development it is hoped that a meaningful and interesting framework will be provided for the child's learning.
>
> The themes begin with the child and gradually expand into a wider social environment. The last theme, 'The School', is purposely placed in order to smooth the transition from pre-school to school. It is envisaged that each theme may take one, two or even three weeks according to the interest shown in the topic by both mothers and children. As the mothers and grandmothers participating in the programme become more confident in the pre-school situation and more aware of the needs and learning processes of the children, they may suggest more activities and be able to implement them. The emergence of additional, spontaneous activities, and even of further themes, should be encouraged whenever possible.

The following 12 themes were used in the program: faces, hands, feet, me, mum (i.e. mother), baby, home, our pre-school, the hospital, the railway station, the shops and the school. The full program for the second of these themes has been reproduced in Figure 12 in order to illustrate the basic approach that was adopted.

After the difficulties encountered during the first year of operation, 1971 saw quite remarkable consolidation in both centres. At Ernabella, the new pre-school building had reached a sufficient stage of completion for it to be used when pre-school resumed. The white teacher who had supervised the activities of the pre-school during 1970 submitted her resignation at the end of that year, her place being taken by Angkuna, one of the Aboriginal mothers. Angkuna previously had been a teacher's aide for a period of over 10 years in the lower primary section of the school at Ernabella. Although not experienced at the pre-school level, then, her considerable 'on-the-job' training and experience at the school helped her to settle quickly into her new role. Angkuna had four children of her own, two of pre-school age, and so understood the

LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES

- Finger rhymes and games
- Simple puppetry
- Short stories
- Incidental talk accompanying all other activities
- Songs and simple singing games
- Listening games; e.g. shut eyes and recognize sounds, guessing games involving animal noises, etc.

NUMBER ACTIVITIES

- *Measurements:* Have an activity box in which the children collect HEAVY stones and LIGHT stones
- *Spatial Knowledge:* Playing with a ROUND ball. Bounce or hit it HIGH and LOW
- *Classification Games:* A SET of mothers and a SET of children. SETS of round tins and other shapes
- *Number:* 2 hands, 5 fingers

HANDS

FINE MOTOR SKILLS

- Feel your own hands
- Feel mum's hands with your hands
- Clap your hands
- Activity box with different textured materials in it to feel and differentiate
- Try on old gloves
- Draw with your fingers in sand and in finger paint
- Trace round your hand in sand or with a pencil. Do the same with mum's hand
- Catching and throwing balls

HEALTH AND HYGIENE

- Washing our hands:
  before we eat,
  after going to the toilet (mothers to supervise children in the toilet).
- Soap and nail brushes available, mothers to supervise

Figure 12 An example of the program at Marree

needs and aptitudes of young children. Furthermore, her particular position in the kinship structure of the Pitjantjatjara people at Ernabella made her admirably suited for such a job, particularly in giving her authority to discipline the children.

Two other mothers, Pulya and Tjampuwa, were selected by the Aboriginal people to be Angkuna's helpers. The translation of the first (preliminary) New South Wales parent workbook had been completed by the end of 1970, and all three women embarked upon the parent education program under the guidance of the project co-ordinator, subsequently completing the workbook and receiving letters of acknowledgment from the Department of Adult Education at the University of Sydney. Unfortunately the mission craft centre continued to require the attendance of all other mothers. In general, then, they were unable to participate in pre-school activities, nor did any other mothers undertake the parent education program. The pre-school therefore was not an AFEC in the true sense, although responsibility for its management did rest with the Aboriginal people themselves.

In addition to use of the workbook, several other steps were taken to provide training for the three Aboriginal mothers who were running the pre-school. Arrangements were made for Eileen Lester, field officer with the New South Wales project, to spend eight weeks at Ernabella during the second term. As a tribal Aboriginal from the western desert, Mrs Lester was readily accepted by the Ernabella people, and she was able to play a most effective role as a resource person and parent educator. During the third term a Maori play centre supervisor came from New Zealand and spent four weeks working in a similar capacity at Ernabella. Finally, towards the end of the year, Angkuna spent three weeks as a guest of the New South Wales project, gaining valuable insight and experience from direct participation in the AFEC movement.

Meanwhile at Marree some very encouraging progress had been made. Following the resignation of the teacher at the end of 1970, arrangements were made with Lex Grey for a Maori play centre supervisor to be based at Marree during the early months of 1971. She was able to spend 10 weeks there, her role being to develop and extend the program of activities for the pre-school, to encourage the involvement of parents, and to train a state Education Department teacher to take over from her. She also was asked, if possible, to broaden the scope of the pre-school to include not only Aborigines but all young children and their parents in the Marree community, regardless of their ethnic background. To her great credit she was able to achieve all of these goals. This was largely due to her remarkable ability to communicate with both parents and children, and to her capacity for sustained hard work despite setbacks and difficulties.

From the beginning of April 1971 the state Education Department released from teaching duties the headmaster of the Marree school, thereby freeing him to develop pre-school and adult education activities. For the remainder of the first term he worked in the pre-school, receiving on-the-job training from the Maori supervisor. Following her departure he assumed responsibility for running the pre-school, maintaining the previous pattern of opening for four mornings each week. At the beginning of the second term the pre-school was able to transfer to a large classroom, part of the original Marree school which had been replaced by a new building. The classroom was under the same roof as the headmaster's residence, and when a new home was built for him the following year the pre-school was able to occupy the entire building. As at Ernabella, every effort was made to provide supplementary resources and training: Eileen Lester spent one week at Marree on her return from Ernabella; a second Maori supervisor visited Marree for two weeks during third term; and the school headmaster spent two weeks in New South Wales, visiting both the Sydney and north coast AFECs.

Overall, there was considerable consolidation at both centres during 1971. The major contributing factor undoubtedly was the work of Eileen Lester and of the two Maori supervisors. The project terminated at the end of the year, the Marree pre-school being taken over by the state Education Department and the Ernabella pre-school by the Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions. Thus, although financial support from the Bernard van Leer Foundation finished at the end of 1971, both pre-schools have been ongoing ventures and continue to operate along broadly similar lines.

The Evaluation

Evaluation of the South Australian project posed particular problems, especially at Ernabella where any testing materials required translation into the vernacular. After a wide review of available materials it was decided to modify the Caldwell Pre-School Inventory (CPSI) and produce a version that was suitable for use with Pitjantjatjara children. This was administered to all children thought to be in the four to five year age group at Ernabella at the end of 1970, and again at the end of 1971. Small groups of children at two other Pitjantjatjara communities in the far north-west of South Australia also were tested, thus providing a comparison group. Each child was questioned separately and orally in his or her own language by one of the mothers under the oversight of the project co-ordinator. The relatively small numbers of children tested eliminated the possibility of using conventional statistical techniques as a reliable means of assessing the effectiveness of the program, and data analysis therefore was confined to a detailed inspection of raw scores. Overall, it was concluded that:

(i) All groups of children obtained high ratings on measures of personal and social relationships, for amongst tribal Aborigines the children tend to mix very freely with the whole community, and to know the names and family relationships of most individuals within the community. The pre-school program appeared to have a negligible influence on this aspect of development. This is understandable in view of the high level of development already noted amongst the children.

(ii) There was some increase in the children's knowledge of their environment, although once again most children began pre-school with well developed abilities in this area.

(iii) There was a small improvement in knowledge of basic number concepts, although children still experienced difficulties in this area due to the wide divergence between Pitjantjatjara and western systems of numeration.*

(iv) Most children showed improvement in motor ability and colour recognition. They generally could draw lines, circles and squares, and also were able to paint pictures of their own experiences in the camp.

Unfortunately no further attempts have been made since 1971 to evaluate the progress of the children at Ernabella, and the evaluation of this part of the South Australian project therefore is based on a very limited set of data. Conclusions can be couched only in the most general terms: it appears that the program at Ernabella had some success in improving the abilities of the children in several of the areas measured by the modified CPSI.

Formal testing of pre-school children at Marree also proved to be of limited value and therefore was confined to use of the PPVT together with an English language version of the modified CPSI. Testing was supplemented by the use of observational records that were devised to give as detailed a picture as possible of each child's development. Teachers were asked to complete a comprehensive review using the records on an individual basis with each child at approximately six-month intervals. A major limitation in the Marree evaluation was the complete lack of any control or comparison groups. Furthermore, all analyses were based only on inspection of raw score data. At the end of 1971 the following conclusions were drawn:

> Overall, the greatest improvements shown by the children attending the Marree pre-school in 1971 were in the area of language and communication. By the end of the year most children were interacting verbally with each other, with their mothers, and with the teacher. There also was a very marked rise in

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*Aboriginal concepts of number are based on a more abstract system that relies less on linear perceptions and quantification. There is therefore no counting system as such, and in most Aboriginal languages there are no words for numbers greater than two or three. Because of its complexity, the Aboriginal number system is very inadequately understood by whites, and the present authors know of few serious attempts to develop a mathematics curriculum for Aboriginal children that is based on their own philosophy of numeration.

> the number of children interacting verbally with other mothers and with visitors to the pre-school.
>
> In their interactions with the teacher most children moved from monosyllabic responses to the use of simple sentences. This change occurred both in the children's responses to teacher questioning and in relation to requests made by the child to the teacher. Language ability as measured by the PPVT also showed a considerable gain between May and November.
>
> The children's development in other areas was less marked. Although consistent gains were recorded in their fine motor co-ordination skills, changes in emotional and physical development were relatively minimal. Gains in the development of number concepts were particularly slight and suggest the need for a more carefully graded programme in this area. (Richardson and Teasdale, 1973: 37)

During 1973 a follow-up study was carried out at Marree with the purpose of assessing the effects of the pre-school on the children's cognitive development. Standardized testing using the PPVT and the 10 basic sub-tests of the revised ITPA was selected as the sole means of evaluation. The tests were administered to the 33 children from the first three grades of the Marree primary school who were present during the period of testing. All but six of the children were of Aboriginal and/or Afghan descent. Thirteen of them had attended the pre-school during the period from 1970 to 1972, the remainder had had no pre-school experience. Due to the small numbers of children involved it was again inappropriate to use conventional statistical techniques, and analysis therefore was based on inspection of raw scores. To facilitate this analysis, all children who had attended pre-school were allocated a rating on a 10-point scale that took into account both duration and regularity of attendance. The outcomes were not unexpected: 'Careful inspection of the data yielded no evidence that the Marree pre-school programme has had any lasting effectiveness in terms of the children's cognitive abilities, at least as measured by the ITPA and the PPVT'. (de Vries et al., 1974: 5)

The lack of observable outcomes at Marree was due to a combination of factors, including the relatively small number of children involved and the attendant problems of research design, the irregular pattern of most children's pre-school attendance, the inappropriateness of most standardized testing instruments for children such as these, and the generally depressed situation that continued to exist at Marree. The report on the follow-up study provided an apt conclusion:

> Problems in evaluation not only were confined to children's performance on specific tests. They encompassed far broader issues and served to highlight how closely research is tied to values in our society. Thirion (1973) mentioned the conflict experienced by researchers in wanting to be objective and at the same time useful. Research in compensatory education has traditionally demanded objectivity which took the form of rigid design, the manipulation of

> readily identifiable variables, and the use of particular evaluative strategies to determine the extent to which aims and objectives were achieved. These theoretical assumptions often failed to account for the unobserved and dynamic elements of real-life situations and hence many findings proved either inconclusive or invalid.
>
> Marree has been no exception to this, and the strong conclusion of this follow-up study is that a more open and flexible approach is needed, both at the level of teaching and of research. In particular, there is a need for closer meshing between school and community, and for more descriptive and person-oriented modes of ongoing evaluation. (de Vries et al., 1974: 15–16)

The Achievements

The South Australian project did not live up to its original expectations, and in the long run its achievements have been relatively limited. There are several reasons for this

First, the brief duration of the project imposed severe constraints, particularly in terms of acceptance of the project's objectives by the Aboriginal people themselves. The original plans for a project of two years duration were quite unrealistic. One simply cannot work within rigid time constraints in Aboriginal communities, for as Lex Grey (1974: 42) points out:

> . . . there is for Aborigines no linear time, no beginning, no end, but a cycle or shallow spiral of time. Each Aborigine is alive, was once before alive, and will be alive again . . . As there is no past, there can be no future, only an ever expanding present.

Project staff were not sufficiently sensitive to this aspect of Aboriginal life, and there was an inevitable culture clash between the western drive for quick results and the Aboriginal attitudes to time coupled with their prolonged and very careful consideration of any proposals for change.

A *second* problem lay in the very remote locations selected for the project, which led to difficulties in recruiting suitable field staff in the first place, together with subsequent limitations in communication between field staff and those attempting to administer the project from Adelaide.

The *third* problem was of a different kind, and arose from the tensions generated within the project by conflicting objectives. Attempts to weld together the folk movement philosophy and the compensatory education approach were not successful, and hindered effective communication with Aboriginal parents. Particularly at Marree, the Aboriginal people never really understood the rationale of the project, and therefore were not in a position to make a firm commitment to it. The blame for this lay firmly with project staff for never resolving amongst themselves the ambiguities of the project's aims and approaches.

Despite the above problems, a number of achievements can be documented. First, of course, was the fact that two pre-schools were established at an earlier stage than would otherwise have occurred. Speculation as to the extent to which the project accelerated the development of pre-school facilities for Aborigines in South Australia is a difficult and inconclusive task. Nevertheless, when the project commenced neither the state nor the federal government had shown any interest in providing financial and administrative support in this area. Successful negotiation of federal government funds for building the Ernabella pre-school appears to have served as a precedent for subsequent federal commitment to the construction of Aboriginal pre-schools elsewhere in South Australia. Furthermore, during the two years immediately following the termination of the project, a number of major developments occurred at the state level, thus changing the situation quite radically:

> By the end of 1972 . . . [the] South Australian Department of Education had accepted full responsibility for the provision of Aboriginal pre-schools throughout the state, thereby setting a precedent for other states in Australia. There are now eleven fully operational Aboriginal pre-schools, including those at Ernabella and Marree, each staffed by a trained teacher and Aboriginal teacher aides. The South Australian Department of Education administers all pre-school centres with the exception of Ernabella. A full-time pre-school adviser who visits all centres including Ernabella was appointed at the beginning of 1973. An in-service training course of seven weeks duration was held for the first time at the beginning of 1973 for all staff involved in Aboriginal pre-schools. (Richardson and Teasdale, 1973: 38)

In the opinion of the present writers, these developments would not have occurred so quickly had the project not provided the initial impetus, especially by encouraging the interest and involvement of senior administrative staff of the various agencies associated with the project. In fact, it would seem reasonable to claim that the project was instrumental in getting the South Australian Education Department to accept responsibility for the pre-school education of Aboriginal children throughout the State. It is therefore concluded that the project not only helped to bring forward by at least 12 months the development of other such centres in South Australia, but also ensured that all centres were fully integrated with the local primary school in each community.

The project also had a considerable influence on the way in which the other centres were established:

(i) Several lessons were learned from the pitfalls and problems encountered at Marree and Ernabella, thus allowing a smoother beginning for the later pre-schools. For example, sporadic attendance by the children at Marree highlighted the need for transport. Consequently, when the other centres opened, this was usually provided right from the start, generally with very encouraging results.

(ii) The teaching programs developed by project staff provided a foundation for the curriculum of the other centres, and in the early stages at least the new pre-schools drew quite heavily upon the ideas and approaches that had been implemented successfully at Marree and Ernabella.

(iii) The concept of parental involvement was a central feature right from the beginning of the other centres, and undoubtedly was introduced as a result of the AFEC movement in New South Wales and its subsequent influence on the South Australian project.

(iv) The close association that developed between the pre-school and the primary school at Marree highlighted the importance of continuity in the early education of Aboriginal children. Subsequent pre-schools therefore were established in close proximity to local primary schools, and teaching staff from both worked together closely. An incidental benefit of this association was an increase in the degree of parental paticipation in the primary schools. As parents, and especially mothers, attended pre-school with their children, they became more familiar with staff and facilities generally, and thus felt more at ease in the primary school also.

Finally, the wider impact of the project needs to be assessed. In retrospect, it is clear that the project was one of the first steps taken in South Australia in a new approach to Aboriginal education and welfare. Despite its limitations, therefore, the present writers believe that the project did play a small part in activating the changes that followed. It also helped to cement closer working relationships between staff of the various government departments that were concerned with Aboriginal welfare, and encouraged them to think more extensively and creatively about the needs of the Aboriginal population of South Australia.

In relation to the impact of the project outside the State, it should be noted that representatives of the South Australian Education Department served on the interdepartmental committee that planned the Katherine project (see Chapter 7). Their experiences with the South Australian project certainly influenced the nature of the program at Katherine, especially in areas such as parent and community involvement, provision of transport, and continuity of education.

7

The Katherine Project

The Setting

Residents of the Northern Territory often complain that their needs have been neglected and misunderstood by people elsewhere in Australia. Lacking until recently the benefits of any form of self-government, their frustration undoubtedly was intensified by control of the Territory from Canberra, some 3000 kilometres away. Educational needs were a source of particular concern, due largely to an unnecessarily complex system of education involving division of responsibility between several government departments. The Northern Territory also has a much higher percentage of Aborigines in its population (almost 27 per cent in 1971) than any of the States, and contains the highest number of Aborigines living on missions and settlements where strong bonds of traditional culture still prevail. Hence a wide gap has existed between the educational needs of Aboriginal and white children, and this helps to explain why there were two separate systems of education in the Territory prior to 1973.

(i) The Education Branch of the Welfare Division of the Commonwealth Department of the Interior was responsible for the administration of special schools situated on Aboriginal missions and settlements. This branch had its own teachers and used a curriculum especially designed to meet the needs of the tribally oriented children in these schools. Considerable emphasis was placed on literacy.

(ii) The Northern Territory Education Branch of the then Commonwealth Office of Education controlled the Community schools in which, generally speaking, there was a preponderance of white children. Since they generally lived on the fringes of white townships, most part-Aboriginal and detribalized children also attended these schools. The Community schools were staffed by

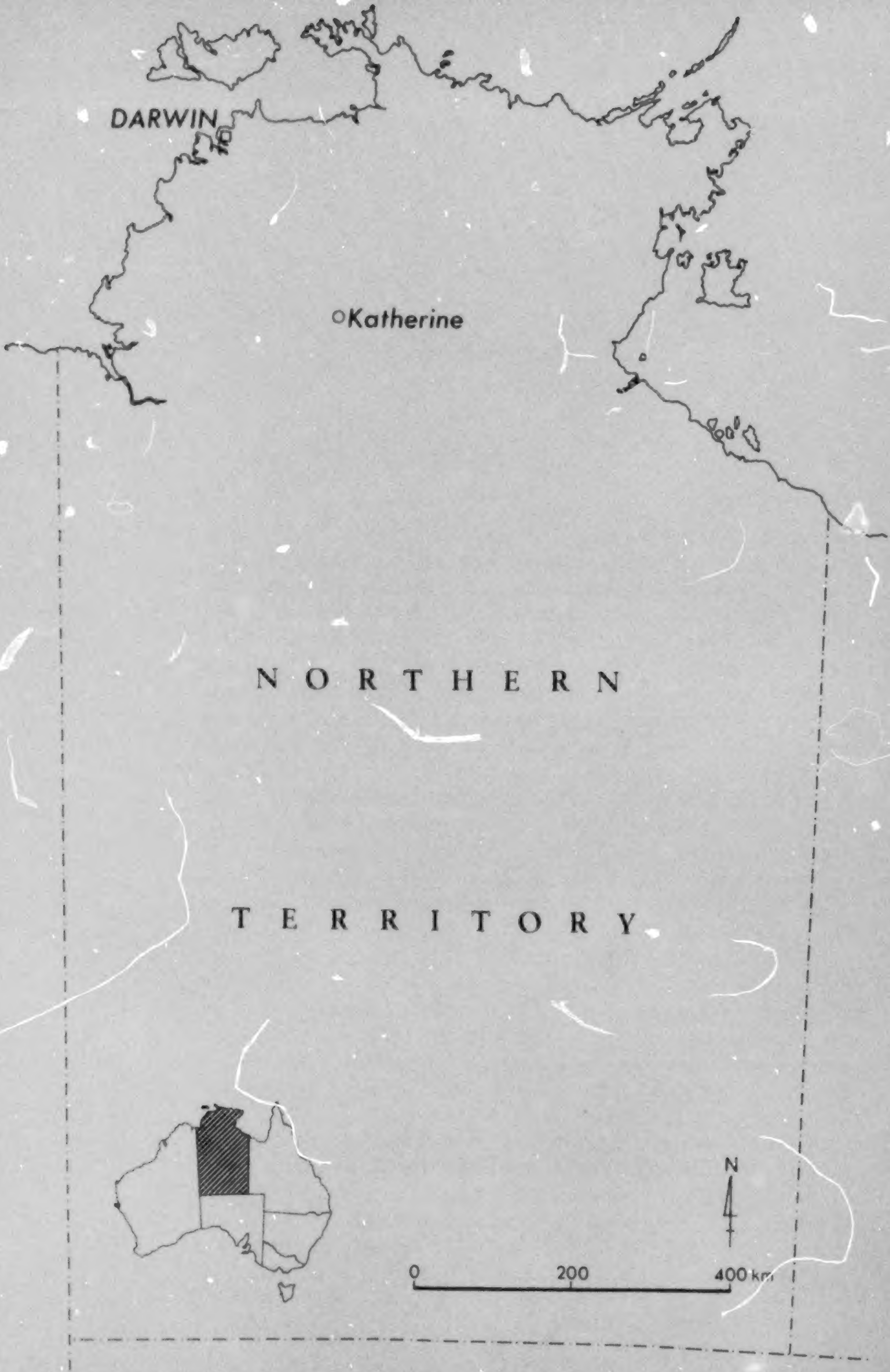
DARWIN
Katherine
NORTHERN
TERRITORY
N
0
200
400 km

Figure 13 Northern Territory showing location of Katherine

teachers seconded from the South Australian Education Department, and they followed the curriculum of that State. In general, the teachers were not trained to cope with the needs of their Aboriginal pupils, and the curriculum was largely irrelevant for such children.

In June 1969 a fact-finding tour of Northern Territory schools was undertaken by Malcolm Fraser and Joyce Steele, then ministers for education in the federal and South Australian governments respectively. Inevitably they were confronted with a wide range of educational problems. In particular, they found that innovation was being stifled, not through lack of teacher initiative, but because of unreasonable administrative delays and the inflexible organization of government departments. Of special concern was the poor progress being made by Aboriginal pupils in the Community schools. It was obvious that classroom teachers were being frustrated in their efforts to improve the situation for Aborigines because of factors beyond their control.

As a result of his visit, Malcolm Fraser gained the support of other federal ministers for the establishment of a small interdepartmental committee of senior administrative staff augmented by other staff who could be co-opted as required. The task of this committee was to advise on the needs of disadvantaged and Aboriginal students in the Northern Territory Community schools, and arrangements were made for an immediate grant of $81 000 to be made available for use by the committee during 1969–70. The first two meetings of the new committee were held late in 1969, the first at Canberra and the second at Katherine, a town of about 3000 people located some 370 kilometres south-east of Darwin. During the second meeting discussions were held with teachers from the Katherine Area School and with members of the local community. It was agreed that an action-research project should be established at Katherine, with special emphasis being placed on the development of communication skills. The committee felt that the project should be of two years duration, and that the outcomes of the experimental program should be made available as quickly as possible to enable its wider implementation in other Community schools. Accordingly the project was initiated with a speed far in excess of most new developments in the Northern Territory, and by February 1970 a set of guidelines had been formulated and a special teacher appointed.

The project was not oriented exclusively to the early childhood years, nor to the needs of Aborigines alone. Nevertheless, as the work progressed, it focused increasingly upon children at the pre-school and infant levels, and catered predominantly for those of Aboriginal descent.

The Objectives

As a first step, the committee made detailed enquiries about the needs of disadvantaged and Aboriginal children in Community schools throughout the Northern Territory. They concluded that the following factors contributed in varying degrees to the low academic achievement of these students:

- environmental factors such as poor housing, low family incomes and deficient family care;
- poor school attendance due to the mobility of the population, inadequate nutrition and associated health problems, lack of sleep, and inability of parents to see the need for education;
- exposure to educational experiences that bore little, if any, relationship to the child's personal growth or future needs;
- inadequate preparation of teachers for the difficult task of working effectively with Aboriginal children;
- lack of continuity in the school due to high staff turnover;
- limited recognition by teachers of the child's communication difficulties (few children, for example, spoke English at home); and
- very limited access to pre-school education.

This statement of problems was used as the basis for planning specific details of the work to be carried out at Katherine during 1970. Members of the committee were experienced practitioners with a project to implement – not for them the niceties of sophisticated experimental design or the luxury of elaborate theoretical underpinnings. They were under considerable pressure to produce tangible results quickly, and so adopted the pragmatic approach of seeking functional solutions to the problems. In this way they had the project operational within three months of their initial meeting, having agreed only upon the general aim of investigating the communication problems of the children and developing special English language programs, particularly in the infant grades.

It was not until the end of 1970, following a careful review of progress during the year, that the committee actually put together a set of objectives. They started with the general aim of using all available resources to 'enable the Aboriginal and underprivileged children at the Katherine Area School and the Katherine Preschool to progress in accordance with their ability' (Hillas, 1974: 29). A number of specific aims then were elaborated:

(i) To make members of the Katherine community aware of the problems, to develop in them a sympathetic understanding of the needs, and to seek their co-operation in assisting the school in its activities.

(ii) To involve the parents by developing in them an awareness of the needs of their children. In particular, an attempt would be made: (a) to encourage the children's fathers to become interested in their school activities; (b) to enable the parents to further their own education if desired; (c) to create an awareness in the parents of the need for correct diet and sufficient sleep, and to establish habits of hygiene; (d) to assist them to establish their self identity; and (e) to assist them to become part of the total school community, taking their equal place with dignity and assurance.

(iii) To assist, and where necessary, to train every teacher to become an integral part of the project.

(iv) To provide for all children a fair and unbiased syllabus which would compensate for the various deficiencies in their environment and motivate them to aims which corresponded to those of the school.

(v) To develop a sympathetic understanding of individual differences among all children, especially with regard to culture and economic status.

(vi) To train the people to manage their affairs internally and in relation to other groups, and to deal with their social, business and personal problems.

(vii) To enable the findings of the project to be made available to other community schools in the Northern Territory.

These are a mixed bag of objectives, reflecting neither a single philosophy nor a unity of approach. In fact, the fourth and fifth aims are not even compatible, for how can one ask teachers to compensate for environmental deficiencies and at the same time develop a sympathetic understanding of cultural and economic differences? This confused logic obviously stems, as in South Australia, from attempts to weld the compensatory education model with a more community and parent oriented approach.

The Program

The project at Katherine had a highly pragmatic orientation, and the committee's first concern therefore was to appoint staff and obtain equipment. Peter Lewis, a person with wide and successful experience in Northern Territory schools, was seconded to the position of project teacher. His initial list of responsibilities must have appeared quite daunting, and it is to his credit that he tackled the work with such vigor and commitment. Hillas (1974: 13)* reports that among other things Lewis was expected to conduct classes in English language for 'groups of children suffering from communication problems', to provide in-service support to the other teachers in the field of language and communication, to foster parental and community involvement, to help with adult education, and to liaise with the pre-school. An Aboriginal teaching assistant was appointed to work in close collaboration with the project teacher, and later in the year a matron was employed as a member of the school staff. She was expected to supervise the cleanliness, health and physical well-being of all children, and to maintain close liaison with parents and health officers. The project staff were provided with a car to facilitate parent and community contacts, an air-conditioned classroom, and a useful range of teaching aids and equipment.

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*The only major report on the Katherine project is a two-volume cyclostyled document prepared by Miss H.S. Hillas, who was a project teacher during 1973 and part of 1974. The report is based on minutes of meetings, progress reports prepared by various project staff, personal observations, and interviews with various people associated with the project.

Although a prompt start had been made, the exploratory nature of much of the work seems to have hampered the project during its first year of operation. In first term the teacher spent each morning working with groups of children from all infant and primary grades who had been withdrawn from their regular classes for short (15-to 25-minute) lessons. No special program was followed. The teacher appears to have devised the curriculum as he went along, drawing upon traditional methods of language stimulation such as pictures and news talks, mime, singing and poetry, sentence drill, and so on. In second term this approach was abandoned in favour of selecting 29 children from the first four grades and forming them into a special class that met for the entire morning. Once again, fairly traditional techniques seem to have been used to stimulate oral and written language development. Nevertheless, the children were receiving far more individual attention than would otherwise have been the case, they were attending school more regularly due to close liaison with parents, and the strong interest and commitment of the teacher must in itself have been of considerable benefit to them.

An important feature of the project was the very extensive contact that was made with Aboriginal parents. The project teacher often visited the camps early in the morning to meet with families over breakfast. A useful side-effect of his presence in the camps at this hour of day was the added inducement it gave for the children to attend school. Afternoons also were free for visits, encouragement being given to other teachers from the school to accompany project staff. It was felt that this would broaden the insight and understanding of the teachers themselves, as well as contributing to improved relationships with parents. Hillas (1974: 19) provides the following report on the visiting program:

> [The project teacher] states that little was obtained from the first few visits, but gradually parents became more aware of the need for schooling. Children were better fed, and began to attend more regularly. Parents also started to take more of an interest in work sent home and began to come along to visit

classes themselves and talk with the headmaster and teachers. Children began to be more interested in their own appearance and to see themselves on a parallel with the European children. They were keen also to help their younger brothers and sisters.

The pre-school at Katherine also was intended to become an integral part of the project. Although the value of pre-school education generally had been acknowledged in the Northern Territory, no Aboriginal children had been enrolled at the Katherine pre-school prior to 1968. The situation was little different in other parts of the Territory. By May 1970, however, there were 13 Aboriginal children enrolled at Katherine, although attendance was irregular in some cases. Parental involvement was minimal. As a result of the continued efforts of the project teacher to liaise between Aboriginal parents and pre-school staff, the situation improved markedly during the year. Transport was regarded as essential because of the distance of the camps from the school, and the opportunity it gave to keep in touch with the parents. Despite the difficulties involved, transport was provided on a fairly regular basis for many of the children, either with the matron, the pre-school teachers, or in taxis paid for by the Welfare Department. By October, some 30 Aborigines were attending on a regular basis.

The pre-school became more directly involved in the project early in 1971, following the appointment of a consultant to advise on the education of Aborigines in all Northern Territory Community pre-schools. She was able to spend a considerable amount of time at Katherine, and a more systematic and carefully planned approach was adopted. Seventeen of the Aboriginal children were allocated to a special group that met for five mornings each week. Two trained teachers took responsibility for these children, and concentrated particularly on the development of language and number skills. The day-to-day program was based largely on the Bereiter-Engelmann curriculum (see Chapter 3), although the teachers did not use the highly intensive teaching methods that are usually associated with this approach. Aboriginal mothers were encouraged to accompany their children and to remain at the pre-school with them. On two or three afternoons each week the two teachers visited camps around Katherine and conducted informal play groups with mothers and children.

Meanwhile a number of important changes had taken place in other parts of the project. Following a careful review of aims and achievements at the end of 1970, the project teacher adopted a stronger advisory role within the school and spent the early weeks of 1971 working intensively with teachers in their classrooms. He also initiated more in-service work through regular meetings and planned discussion with groups of teachers. The special class was not reconstituted until later in the term, and it was reduced to almost half its previous size. Additionally, a preparatory class was established for those newly enrolled five-year-olds who were considered too immature to cope with the demands of the normal first grade curriculum. After-school youth clubs, parent liaison and adult education continued as an integral part of the project during 1971, mostly on a wider scale because more teachers were willing to be involved in activities of this kind.

The project originally was scheduled to finish at the end of 1971. It was decided to continue beyond that date, however, despite the need to replace all project staff and senior personnel in the school due to transfers away from Katherine. This lack of continuity must have had a detrimental effect on the project, and highlights one of the ongoing problems in remote schools, that of rapid staff turnover. During 1972, for example, no fewer than four people occupied the position of matron at the Katherine school. Some of the difficulties were offset by the appointment of an assistant project teacher in 1972 and additional specialist resource staff in 1973.

An important decision was taken during the first term of 1972 when the special classes were disbanded. It was felt that the children had reached a satisfactory level of proficiency in the field of language and communication, and therefore could readily and profitably return to normal classrooms. Furthermore, the pre-school program had been sufficiently effective to remove the need for special transitional arrangements for newly enrolled pupils. The two project teachers now were able to devote all of their time each morning to supporting regular classroom teachers by team-teaching with them, assisting with programming and lesson planning, and introducing parents and teachers both at school and in the home. Additionally, they continued the practice of early morning camp visits, as well as spending the afternoon visiting homes, assisting with pre-school work and play groups, and organizing sporting activities, youth clubs and adult education literacy classes.

A second important development during 1972 was the establishment of a transitional pre-school for children under the age of four. It developed out of the informal afternoon play groups that the pre-school teachers had organized, and sought to provide experiences that would allow the children to take greater advantage of regular pre-schooling. Strong emphasis was placed on family involvement, language activities, cleanliness and hygiene, and the provision of a balanced daily meal.

It is difficult to ascertain just when the Katherine project finished. It certainly continued into 1973, despite recurrent problems of staff turnover. The interdepartmental committee that initiated the project was disbanded by the middle of 1973 as part of a large scale re-organization that unified all educational provisions in the Northern Territory into a single administrative department. Reports from the school, however, indicate that the project was still being identified as such during 1974, in spite of lack of special funding or outside monitoring.

It speaks well of the project that its momentum apparently continued unabated long after the formal administrative structure had been dismantled. Had the project followed the original aim (i.e. that of improving the language and communication skills of Aboriginal children) it is very unlikely that this would have happened. The strength of the project lay in its steady growth outwards, so that eventually it encompassed the whole school together with parents and the wider community. It also encompassed all levels of education from toddlers play groups to adult literacy classes. In this way the project enabled the school to become the prime agent for community development in Katherine.

The Evaluation

As previously explained, the Katherine project had a singularly pragmatic orientation, and notions of research and evaluation appear to have been given no consideration by the planning committee during the first year of operation. It subsequently was decided that no attempt would be made to evaluate the project using standardized tests, but that teachers should be encouraged to make systematic observations on the development of each of the children in their class. To guide teachers in their observations a senior educational psychologist from Darwin was invited to collaborate with the project teacher in preparing a suitable record sheet. Drawing heavily on Gunzberg's (1968) Progress Assessment Charts,* they devised a communication profile and had copies ready for distribution by the middle of 1971. It was intended that this profile be used in various forms throughout the school, particularly with those children receiving language instruction in the special classes.

The fate of the profiles seems obscure. Project reports make only one subsequent reference to them: at the end of 1972 a brief summary was given of an evaluation of the project based on the 'graphs', as they were then called. Only four conclusions were drawn, and even these seem somewhat vague and inconsistent (Hillas, 1974: 59):

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*These charts were devised by Gunzberg (1968) in Britain for assessing the development of mentally retarded children. They provide a qualitative picture of the child's functioning, thus enabling an individual remedial program to be prepared. Since they rely on systematic observation rather than formal testing, they provided a suitable base for the Katherine profiles.

(i) The project had met with success in some areas, notably with Aboriginal children, and with lack of progress in others, particularly with underprivileged Europeans.

(ii) Although the special classes had been disbanded during the year and the children returned to regular classes, a large percentage of the Aboriginal children still were below average in their work.

(iii) The graphs indicated that European and many part-Aboriginal children were the best participators and had attained the highest standards.

(iv) Underprivileged Europeans were the group with the lowest level of participation and standard of work.

The only other criterion that can be used objectively to assess the effectiveness of the Katherine project is school attendance. It is clear from the report that regularity of attendance improved in the primary school; parent-teacher interactions became more frequent; and a much higher proportion of Aboriginal children and their parents became involved in the pre-school program. In these respects, then, measurable progress was made in achieving the objectives of the project.

Overall, the formal evaluation of the work at Katherine was quite inadequate, and no firm conclusions can be drawn about the outcomes of the project, especially in terms of its effects upon the children's cognitive development and school achievements. In particular, it is disappointing that a systematic attempt was not made to analyse the data collected using the communication profiles.

The Achievements

Although the outcomes of the project have not been measured in any objective way, it is clear that it did have an important influence, especially at the local level. In concluding her report on the project, Hillas (1974: 107) had this to say:

> The project has involved many people and all have played a part in the work. There has been a noticeable improvement in the physical well-being of the children, and this has contributed to their intellectual development. Parents have been actively involved and have gained some idea of what education is about. Katherine people can be encouraged by their efforts and should be prepared to step out and take a lead in future similar projects.

The attempts to overcome the problems of Aboriginal education in the Katherine area thus made encouraging progress during the period of operation of the interdepartmental committee. As the project was oriented towards family education, with similar attacks on the social, health and vocational problems of the children, it encompassed areas of education extending from the pre-school to the adult level. Within the school itself, the following benefits seem to have accrued:

- Regularity of attendance improved substantially. Children thus were spending more time at school, and greater continuity was achieved in their education.
- The emphasis on health care and nutrition resulted in a noticeable improvement in the general health of the children.
- Greater parental interest and involvement was achieved, and the school became more closely integrated with the Katherine community.
- Correspondingly, the teachers became aware of the home and community environment of the children, and were able to provide an education that was more relevant to their needs.
- More effective integration was achieved between the work of the pre-schools and the primary school.

During the latter part of 1976 one of the present writers (Whitelaw), who was a member of the interdepartmental committee at Katherine from 1971 to 1973, paid a return visit to the town to make a subjective assessment of the longer term outcomes. He found that:

- The transitional pre-school for Aboriginal and other disadvantaged children was still operating under the guidance of a highly trained teacher, who by then had become a member of the Katherine Area School staff.
- There had been further consolidation of the work of the pre-schools. By 1976 they were being regarded as an integral part of the primary school, whereas they previously operated as separate units.
- Aboriginal parents and the community in general had continued to be involved in schooling at all levels.
- A much closer working relationship had been established between the staff of the school and other professional people in the community who were concerned with Aboriginal welfare.
- A genuine attempt was being made to provide a pre-school program in keeping with the needs of the Aboriginal children, while not neglecting the interests and needs of non-Aborigines.
- Although a great deal still remained to be done, the teachers seemed better trained to work with Aboriginal children, and thus were more able to understand their special problems and needs.

The above improvements cannot be attributed solely to the influence of the project. General growth and consolidation in the field of Aboriginal education during the period under review inevitably would have led to improvements at Katherine, even if the project had not been implemented there at all. Nevertheless, the present writers believe that the project was the single most significant factor in achieving such positive change in the Katherine schools.

Reference finally must be made to the wider influence of the project. Unfortunately, during its final phases, major organizational changes were taking place in the Northern Territory education system, and the culmination of the project passed virtually unnoticed by those outside Katherine. These changes involved the reorganization of the school system under a single authority based in Darwin, and the withdrawal of South Australian teachers and curricula. At about the same time a change in the ruling political party in Australia (the first for over two decades) resulted in a substantial shift in government policy. Educationists in the Northern Territory and elsewhere were caught up in such a state of flux that projects such as Katherine were almost completely overlooked.

It would be wrong, however, to imply that the project had no impact at all outside Katherine. Despite its geographical size, there are relatively few teachers in the Northern Territory*, and the informal transmission of outcomes inevitably took place via conferences, meetings, circulation of printed reports, staff transfers from Katherine to other schools, and so on. While there is no evidence, then, that the Katherine project resulted in any major initiatives or policy changes in the territory generally, it is clear that the lessons learned and experiences gained were effectively transmitted via informal teacher communication networks, and considerable benefits must have accrued thereby in many of the schools of the Northern Territory.

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*The total population of the Northern Territory in 1974 was 101 200. An estimated 1400 teachers were employed at that time.

8

The Queensland Project

The Setting

During the early 1960s the senior staff of the Queensland Department of Education shared the same concern as their counterparts in other States about the very poor scholastic performance of Aboriginal children. A genuine attempt was being made in schools attended by Aborigines to upgrade the standard of teaching using conventional remedial techniques: greater attention was given to the teaching of reading; more money was set aside for the purchase of remedial reading materials and other instructional aids; and more time was spent conducting in-service conferences with teachers. Nevertheless the results were disappointing, the children's performance on standardized tests showing little or no improvement. It was becoming evident that a different approach was required.

Meanwhile, the foundations of the Queensland project were being laid elsewhere in the Department by staff of the research division, under the leadership of Norman Hart. They had begun a series of studies in Brisbane on the language development of children handicapped by cerebral palsy, defective vision, mental retardation, deafness and reading disability. Oral language weaknesses were diagnosed using the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities, and remedial language programs then were devised to cater for the special needs of each group. Although the programs concentrated solely on improving oral language, significant improvements also were noted in the children's reading ability.

In reviewing the approach to Aboriginal education it was felt that the work of Hart and his colleagues might provide the key to an effective solution. Thus, when news of the likely availability of van Leer funding reached Queensland, a comprehensive submission was prepared without delay by Norman Alford, staff in-

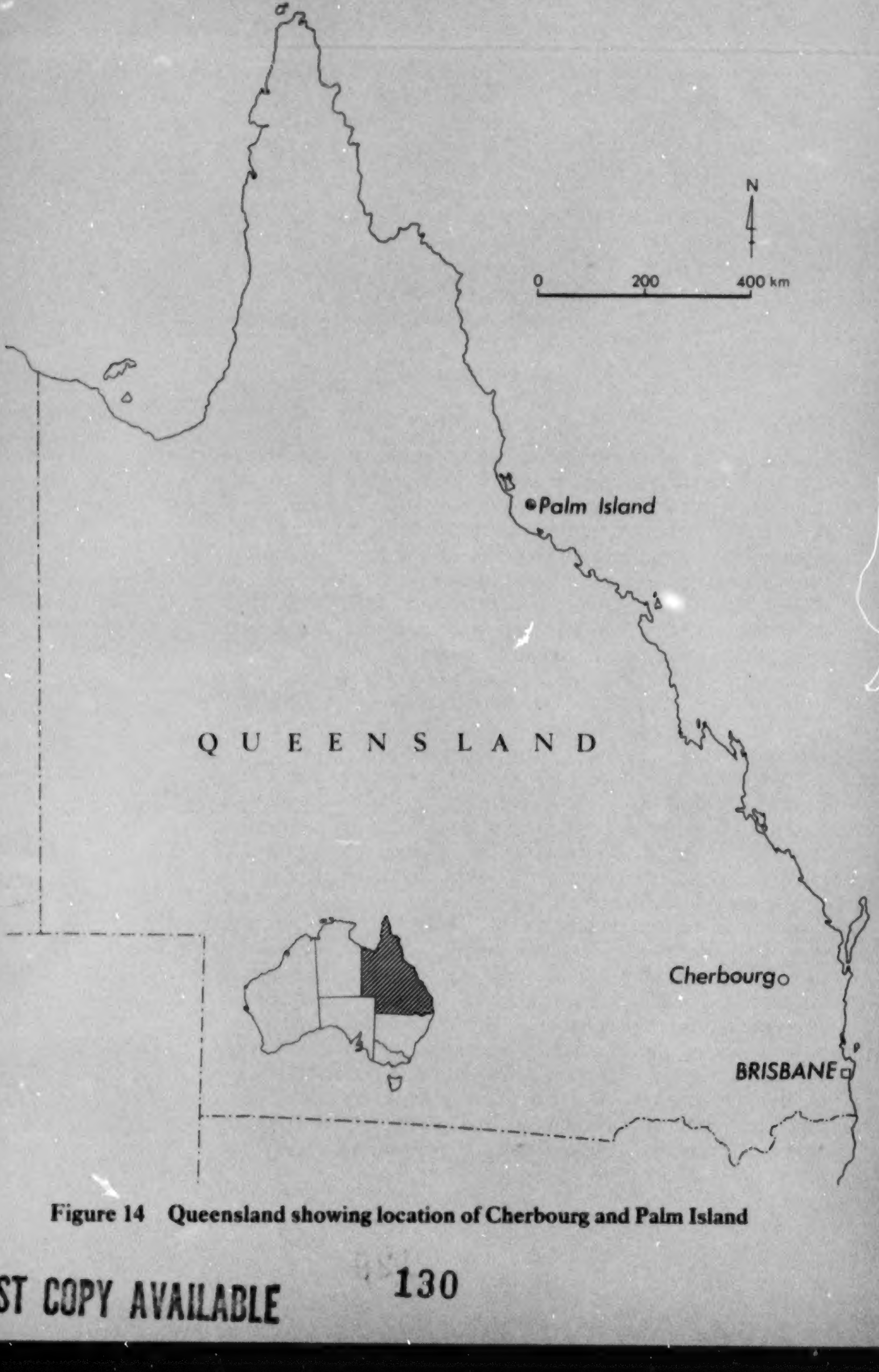

N
0
200
400 km
Palm Island
QUEENSLAND
Cherbourg
BRISBANE

Figure 14 Queensland showing location of Cherbourg and Palm Island

spector in charge of research and curriculum. He was assisted by a small committee which included Norman Hart, the proposed project drawing heavily upon the outcomes of the latter's ongoing work on language development. Betty Watts, now Professor of Special Education at the University of Queensland, also played an important role on the advisory committee.

The project differed from most of the others under review in that its prime concern was not with the pre-school, but with the first three grades of the primary or elementary school (i.e., with children between the ages of five and eight). The committee also decided to work amongst Aborigines whose mother tongue was a form of English, rather than with tribal people who had retained the vernacular. Two Aboriginal communities were selected as sites for the project: Cherbourg, about 300 kilometres north-west of Brisbane; and Palm Island, located some 60 kilometres off the coast near Townsville (see Figure 14). These were the two largest English-speaking Aboriginal communities in Queensland, and thus offered the greatest scope for conducting a project of the kind envisaged. Furthermore, the two centres were amongst the most geographically accessible to members of the project team, and both had the potential for good co-operation with residents. Another important factor in the choice of these sites was the marked contrast between the two centres in opportunities for the Aborigines to interact with the white population. Cherbourg, being relatively close to major centres of population, has had a long history of contact with whites, whereas Palm Island, while readily accessible by air or launch from Townsville, is considerably more isolated from contact of this kind. Within both communities, however, the schools were attended almost exclusively by Aborigines, the only white enrolments being the children of teachers and administrative staff.

Both communities were established in the early 1900s in the form of Aboriginal reserves, tight control being exercised upon the employment, freedom of movement, ownership of property, etc., of their residents (see Chapter 1). For several decades the reserves were relative backwaters, the Aboriginal people being separated from wider community life under the guise of preservation and protection. Legislation in Queensland during the mid 1960s removed some of the restrictive administrative measures and attempted generally to promote the progressive development of Aboriginal people. The legislation also changed the nomenclature of government reserves to that of Communities, and provided for greater Aboriginal involvement in local administration and decision making.

During the early 1970s both the Cherbourg and Palm Island Communities had populations of approximately 1200, many of the families having been in permanent residence for at least one generation. The two schools each had an enrolment of about 300 children when the project commenced. At Cherbourg the school is centrally located, the 160 homes in the community being built in rows around three sides of the school. The people of Palm Island are more widely scattered, living in some 200 homes along a three-kilometre coastal strip. The present population there has come from widely distributed areas of Queensland, and at least 12 different tribal languages are spoken among the various groups of older people. An interesting feature is the marked degree of social stratification that has developed as a result of the heterogeneous origins of the residents and their subsequent isolation from other groups. A recent description of life on Palm Island from an Aboriginal viewpoint has been provided by Rosser (1978).

Funding for the Queensland project commenced during 1968, and by the beginning of the following year three full-time field staff had been appointed, Norman Hart had been released from his college lecturing duties for one day each week, and the first stage of the project had begun in earnest with a most comprehensive program of basic data collection.

The Objectives

As with the Bourke and South Australian projects, the work in Queensland started with a very strong compensatory education emphasis. The early documents were quite explicit: the aim of the project was to develop a compensatory education program for Aboriginal children. The linguistic development of the children was seen as the basic problem, and their language was variously described in the documents as being 'impoverished', 'retarded', 'inadequate', and 'deficient'. Members of the project committee therefore considered that their first task was to investigate the extent and manifestations of such deficiencies as limited vocabulary and syntactical structure, inability to handle abstract symbols and complex language forms, difficulties in developing and maintaining thought sequences verbally, and restricted verbal comprehension.

The above emphases shifted very quickly during the first year of field work. Two factors seem to have been responsible: (a) the personal philosophies and approaches of some of the original field workers injected quite a different line of thinking into the project, and (b) the experience of data collection during 1969 opened up new dimensions for project staff, close observation of Aboriginal children in their natural settings providing a new awareness of the social and cultural context of their behaviour. One of the first full-time appointees to the project, for example, was a highly qualified linguist, and she immediately undertook a preliminary survey of the language used naturally by the children in their everyday communication with each other. The following summary of her work contrasts sharply with the notion of language deficit expounded in earlier project writings:

> Aboriginal English in Queensland may be regarded as a dialect of English in its own right, with rules of pronunciation and grammar which can be formulated. The apparent variability of the English of some Aboriginal speakers is due to a mixing of this dialect with a more standard form of English. In general, the Aboriginal English dialect differs from standard English in three aspects: phonologically, the rate of utterance and the intonation differ considerably from standard English, and the permitted sound sequences are more restricted; grammatically, there is less inflection than in standard English – plural markers and some auxiliary verbs and verbal suffixes are rare; lexically there appears to be a more restricted vocabulary of English origin, though this may be offset by words from the pre-existing Aboriginal languages. These conclusions are as yet tentative, based on a very limited body of data. (Sharp, 1969: ii)

Linguistic analysis such as this led to a new awareness of the integrity of Aboriginal English as a functionally complete and adequate system for the people using it, and this in turn resulted in a more ready acceptance of the concept of language difference, rather than one of language deficit. It took some time, however, to accomplish this transition in the project's underlying philosophy, and in the interim there was an uneasy marriage between the difference and deficit approaches. This led to some of the same ambiguity and tension that occurred in the South Australian project. Consider, for example, the inconsistencies between the following three statements, all of which have been taken from the first major report on the project published by the Queensland Department of Education (1970):

> . . . the failure of these [Aboriginal children] is not associated with physical or mental handicap but is inevitably related to the cultural deprivation which characterises this minority group within our community. (p. 3)
>
> . . . the Queensland van Leer project team tested all Grade 1 children at the Cherbourg and Palm Island community schools, as well as a sample of five year old Brisbane children . . . Comparison of the mean performance indicated an overall language retardation of approximately fifteen months amongst Aboriginal first grade children. It should be stressed that this is a measure of their performance in terms of the requirements of standard Australian English, and in no way reflects ability to communicate with other users of Aboriginal English. (p. 2)
>
> Emphasis is being placed on the discovery of the existing ideas and language patterns of young Aboriginal children . . . At no time will there be any suggestion that Aboriginal English is not a valid form of communication. (p. 24)

By 1972, however, the rationale and aims of the project had been clarified, and most of the former inconsistencies had disappeared. The prime focus now was on the positive aspects of Aboriginal culture and language, and references to deprivation and deficit had all but disappeared. Alford (1974: 114–15) has provided a particularly lucid statement of the objectives of the project at that time in his address to the Bernard van Leer Foundation seminar on curriculum in early childhood education that was held in Jerusalem during 1972:

> *The major aim* of the programme is to help the children to develop facility in the use of the language structures of Standard English. It is hoped that they will eventually make automatic use of such English in school and in comparable settings. This accomplishment should facilitate their cognitive development and their learning of reading and writing skills and should so ensure a more successful and satisfying school career.
>
> The children will continue to live their lives in their home settings. It is not the intention of the programme to alienate them from their own people or to diminish the potency of the particular form of English spoken in their communities. If this were to happen, the children would lose the ability to communicate readily with their parents and other members of their own community, this would result in loss of feelings of security and would lead also to emotional impoverishment. Derogation of the Aboriginal form of English should be avoided at all times.
>
> It is hoped that through the programme the children will in time become proficient and secure in the two forms of English, each being used by them in its appropriate place.
>
> *The second aim* is to help each child to develop a favourable self concept. In establishing feelings of self-esteem and pride in self, children need frequent experiences of success. It is important that the teacher be continuously aware of each child's level of achievement so that the introduction of new activities provides both a challenge and an opportunity for successful attainment.
>
> *The third aim* is the stimulation of cognitive development. To this end, the children need to be helped to perceive and understand their familiar world more accurately. In addition, there is need, through carefully selected experiences, to widen the children's world and to help them to develop concepts which become gradually more precise and enriched.
>
> Problem-solving skills and critical-thinking skills need to be fostered. The children should gradually become able to use language to deal more effectively with problems presented by their everyday environment and those posed within the school programme.
>
> *The fourth aim* is the fostering of creativity by encouraging children to adopt novel approaches to problems and their solutions. In addition, their imagination should be stimulated with a view to the personal enrichment of their lives.

This comprehensive statement of objectives was prepared during the early months of 1972, and contrasts very markedly indeed with the initial emphasis on compensatory education. It illustrates clearly the major shift in underlying philosophy that occurred during the early stages of the Queensland project. This shift from a 'cultural deficit' to a 'cultural difference' position undoubtedly resulted in some confusion and misunderstanding among teachers and other field staff. As will be seen later, however, this was overcome fairly quickly via intensive efforts to provide teachers with in-service conferences and on-the-job training.

The objectives of the program have undergone surprisingly little change since 1972. The latest project publication (Queensland Department of Education, 1979) lists essentially the same set of aims as that enumerated by Alford (1974), except for two variations:

(i) The distinctions between Aboriginal English and standard English have been clarified, and both now are described as dialects. The instructional process therefore is aimed at helping the child to become bidialectal.

(ii) One more aim has been added, that of promoting language development in general. Expanding on this, the document states:

> The emphasis on language in this program reflects much more than the goal of developing competencies in standard English as a second dialect. It indicates the overriding importance attributed to language in communicating and thinking, irrespective of the particular code or codes which the children may use. *What* children say and write is undoubtedly of greater importance than *how* they say it or write it. (Queensland Department of Education, 1979: 9)

Having considered the objectives of the project we turn now to the procedures used in formulating the actual teaching program.

The Program

The first stage of the Queensland project involved an extensive survey of the oral language use of young children using a task analysis approach. This involved: (a) isolating the language units characteristic of Aboriginal children from Palm Island and Cherbourg who were to commence formal schooling within the ensuing three months; and (b) comparing these language structures with those of two, three and four year old Anglo-Australian children from suburban Brisbane. Hart (1973: 164) has summarized the key features of this approach:

> In accordance with task analysis philosophy the language units of the Aboriginal children set the *baseline language behaviour*; the isolation of language structures of the various age groups of typical white children define the goals clearly. The task then remains to programme teaching strategies to move from the restricted code of Aboriginal English to the more elaborated code of Australian English. Thus Australian English is taught as a second language and the time gap between the presentation of heard, spoken and read forms closed as soon as possible.

Samples of spoken language were collected using radio microphones concealed in a specially made jacket worn by each child whose language was being recorded. Approximately two hours of language were collected from each child, all language samples

Figure 15 Puppets are used extensively for oral language activities, especially in the area of phonics

being fed into a tape recorder for subsequent analysis. The radio microphone enabled the children to move where they wanted, thus facilitating uninhibited language sampling. Every attempt was made to sample natural interaction with peers, adults, older and younger children. Following the transcription of the language samples from the tape recordings, all material was processed using a sophisticated, computer-based approach that transformed the recorded speech into three separate language concordances. These concordances provided an index of the range and frequency of single words and sequences of words.

The collection and analysis of the language samples occupied the whole of 1969. They were supplemented by standardized testing using several measures, including the revised Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test. All of these data then were used as the basis for the second stage of the project, that of preparing a carefully sequenced teaching program for implementation at Cherbourg and Palm Island. By May 1970 the first units of the program were ready for use with first grade children, and over the following three years the program was developed and refined progressively until it was being taught to all children in the first three grades of both schools. This teaching program is the central feature of the Queensland project. It is undoubtedly the most thoroughly researched and carefully prepared program that has been implemented with Aboriginal children anywhere in Australia. In fact, in the opinion of the present authors, the Queensland program is the most significant achievement arising from all six of the projects under review.

What are the main features of the program? Appendix III provides a detailed summary of the rationale, content and method of implementation of the first year of the program. It will be seen from this summary that:

(i) The program is all-inclusive. Although it is basically a language program it is designed to incorporate all other aspects of the school curriculum in an integrated approach. Concepts and skills which generally are regarded as aspects of mathematics, science, social studies, and so on, have been promoted within the context of a broadly based language development program. Classroom activities have been considered in terms of their potential for producing multiple learning outcomes (Dwyer, 1976). The first year program occupies the whole school day, thus providing a complete curriculum for the child's initial year of schooling. The second and third year documents provide a detailed language program with some suggestions for integration across subject areas, but teachers must undertake their own planning in many aspects of mathematics, social studies, etc.

(ii) The program consists of four basic strands involving the development of: (a) oral language patterns of standard English; (b) reading and writing skills; (c) perceptual skills (listening, looking, touching); and (d) problem solving and critical thinking.

(iii) Throughout the three years of the program the four strands have been developed through twenty-one blocks of work, each of approximately five weeks duration. All blocks have been organized around a unifying theme. Thus, in the first year of the program, the seven blocks utilize the following themes: self concept; personal competence; home and family; animal families; work people do; transport and travel; and the world around us. The themes have been planned sequentially to move from the individual to the wider social environment. Each theme provides opportunities for a discovery-based approach to learning.

(iv) The program utilizes a wide variety of teaching methods emphasizing active participation by the children, extensive use of music, games and other creative activities, and the utilization of resources from the child's own environment.

(v) A number of innovative aids has been developed as a means of enriching and strengthening the teaching program. These include the use of: (a) a tape deck and headphones to develop listening skills; (b) reading materials developed by the teacher and based on the child's own experiences; (c) a family of alliteratively named puppets (e.g. Pippo Possum; Willy Wombat) to sustain interest in auditory activities (see Figure 15); (d) photographic

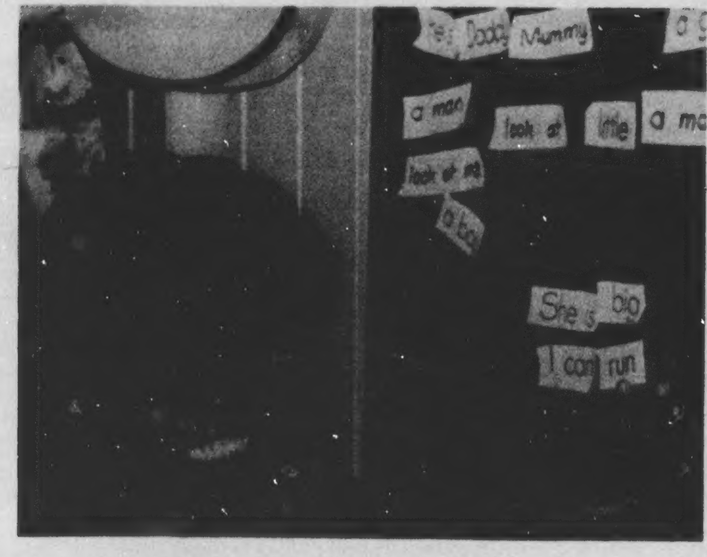


Figure 16 The magnetic board allows children to create their own written sentences without having to wait for writing skills to develop

slides and prints, film strips (including tachistoscopic projection of images), and other visual materials; and (e) a magnetic board that allows children to manipulate printed language sequences (see Figure 16).

Overall, a great deal of stress was placed on the program starting within the context of the child's home and community experiences. John Dwyer, who was headmaster of the school at Cherbourg during the period when the project was first implemented there (and who later became responsible for the wider dissemination of the project), has described this aspect of the program in the following way:

> How is such a programme made to work? First, and most important, it starts with the child – it builds on the child's experience, the child's language, the child's ideas, the child's manipulation of materials, the child's world both inside and outside the classroom. A warm, supportive classroom atmosphere is essential. Although situations are contrived to the extent that certain selected forms of language are more likely to occur than others, the child's own language attempts are used as the basis of the language development programme. His non-standard utterances are accepted and modified in a positive way . . .
>
> In addition, the teacher needs sometimes to take the children out of the classroom into their own familiar learning environment. By moving into the child's normal interaction space, the teacher opens vast possibilities for learning about the children – the things which interest them, the language they use

> (especially their terms for concepts), and the emotional loading of experiences. The problem of relevance is reduced, a wealth of ideas for activities based on children's interests may result. The bonus may be that children will continue these learning-oriented activities in their own time. Environmental materials, such as leaves and shells to establish ideas of conservation and seriation, are still available after school is finished for the day, so that the school is able to get out from behind its locked door into the "real" lives of the children. (Dwyer, 1976: 19–20)

Preparing the Teachers

The success of such a comprehensive program clearly depended heavily upon the effectiveness of teachers in implementing it. Accordingly the project committee gave very careful attention to the induction and in-service training of teachers at Cherbourg and Palm Island. It was essential to inculcate the philosophy of the project in such a way that the attitudes and expectations of teachers were changed, often quite radically. During an interview in 1976 John Dwyer commented that: 'If teachers firmly believe that they are building on skills that are already there, and that they are extending the range of these skills, then you have much more chance of positive support by teachers than if you start to emphasise failure.'

The teaching program itself was designed deliberately to sensitize teachers to the philosophy of the project. Julia Koppe, who had prime responsibility for the compilation of the program, has explained this aspect of its development:

> From the beginning of the project we have been feeding back in [to the programme] our knowledge of the children's out-of-school activities, and trying to sensitise the teacher to the system of the child. There has always been this fairly strong component of tuning the teacher in to the children's realities.
>
> We consciously explored ways of setting up the programme to give lots of support to the teacher. Many of the actual activities gave opportunities for teachers to begin interacting with children in a different way. There are numerous activities where the teacher is acting as observer and recorder – where we tried to develop a fairly informal situation in which the children felt free to talk to their mates. In this way we were hoping to expose the teacher to a lot of the children's ideas and language. The basic idea of the teacher needing to develop receptive competence in the children's system has become more openly identified, however, as the project has gone along. (Interview, 1976)

Despite the care that was taken to change the attitudes and expectations of teachers, the project team still felt it advisable to make the program sufficiently robust to withstand many of the blunders of inexperienced staff. Teachers could virtually pick up the handbooks and start teaching immediately, so detailed and specific were the curriculum guidelines. Not only were they given week-by-week programs together with all necessary equipment and materials, but daily teaching notes setting out specific content and procedures for individual lessons also were provided. Because of the remarkable care and forethought that was given to the preparation of the handbooks, they met with an immediately enthusiastic response in the schools. John Dwyer takes up the story:

> The success of the programme was obvious very quickly. There was a lot of material being supplied, and the children were enjoying it thoroughly. It was good fun for everyone, and the teachers became really involved in it. They began to feel that they had a real role to play in the project, and so became very committed. (Interview, 1976)

Comprehensive curriculum materials and enthusiastic acceptance, however, have not been sufficient on their own, and the provision of effective in-service support for those teaching the program has been a continuing challenge. The essential problem has been one of attitude change. It has been very difficult in practice for teachers to accept completely each child's language and culture, and to acknowledge that whatever a child expresses, obscenities included, has validity in the classroom. Thus curriculum outlines have continued to stress that:

> If teachers continue to perceive children in terms of white middle-class expectations, both teacher and children are likely to be exposed to an unprofitable and frustrating school experience. Instead, it is hoped that the teacher will gain an ever-increasing understanding of the child *in his own world* recognizing that the child operates in a different cultural system and that he uses a rule-governed language code which is as valid as that of the teacher. (Queensland Department of Education, 1979: 10)

In order to reinforce the above concepts increasing emphasis has been given to in-service training for all teachers in Queensland Aboriginal schools. Strong emphasis is placed on teachers becoming listeners and observers, and advisory staff with wide experience in the van Leer program seek to foster these skills via school-based workshops and individual support of teachers. High staff turnover, however, continues to dilute the effectiveness of the in-service program, while funding limitations have resulted in insufficient advisory and resource personnel to maintain the program at its optimal level.

An exciting innovation has been the development of a series of ten in-service kits by advisory teachers working in the field. Each kit utilizes audiovisual presentation to elaborate upon a particular aspect of the language program. Samples of work produced by children and teachers are included in the visual displays. Kits are sent to schools only upon request, and then only one at a time, thus ensuring that they are used promptly and not simply stored away and disregarded.

Community Involvement

One feature of the project that the committee became increasingly less satisfied with was that of parent and community liaison. Although interaction between teachers and Aboriginal adults was strongly encouraged, staff found it difficult to bridge the gap between school and community. In particular, it seemed that the aims and rationale of the project were not entirely understood by most of the Aboriginal parents and community leaders. With the main impetus coming from Betty Watts, a proposal was drawn up for the employment of Aboriginal teacher aides on a pilot basis at Cherbourg in the hope that they would facilitate the bridging process. A successful approach was made to the Bernard van Leer Foundation for supplementary funding, and the scheme was introduced early in 1972. The designation 'teacher aide' was dropped in favour of 'classroom assistant', since the aim was to employ mature adults who could adopt a much wider role than that normally assigned to aides. In fact it was hoped that the people chosen would assume an active leadership role in the community on the one hand, and on the other would represent the Aboriginal adult world in the classroom. Six full-time Aboriginal appointments were made to the Cherbourg school, together with that of an advisory teacher who had the full-time responsibility for their induction and in-service training. The advisor also worked with the teachers, helping them to make effective use of the assistants. In summarizing the outcomes of the scheme at the end of its first year, the advisor made the following points (Dyer, 1973:30–1):

(i) Each assistant's role can be varied and diverse.

(ii) There is a need in this type of program to prepare paraprofessionals for specialization of tasks according to their individual talents and skills.

(iii) It is possible that some assistants will be more skilful than others in home/school liaison. Interpersonal skills and understanding of school life through all grade levels are prerequisites.

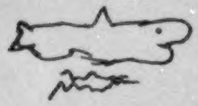
(iv) Where assistants are required to work in the classroom as members of the instructional team it seems that a satisfactory team should include no more than two teachers utilizing the assistance of one paraprofessional.

(v) Parents in this type of community are apparently far more interested in the education of their children than many would suspect or accept.

(vi) Many parents have shown a reticence to visit the school previously, possibly because they have not been really sure of it; the school has not been perceived as a part of their community. In a group, and with assistants present, they will visit the school quite readily and frequently.

So successful was the classroom assistant scheme at Cherbourg that it soon became implemented by the Queensland Department of Education in all Aboriginal schools throughout the State, and within only two or three years the indigenous assistants were an integral and accepted part of the school scene. An important element in the early stages was the education of principals regarding the recruitment, selection, and effective utilization of assistants. This was facilitated by a most comprehensive project handbook, *Involving indigenous classroom assistants in primary schools* (Dyer, 1974).

The language program also has become an integral part of the Aboriginal school curriculum throughout the State, and copies of the three handbooks published by the Queensland Department of Education (1971, 1973a, 1973b) containing the first year of the program have found wide acceptance and use. More recently the second and third year program also has been published following extensive trialling and revision. This comprises an initial handbook outlining the discovery component of the second year program (Koppe and Burton, 1975), together with separate handbooks for each of the fourteen blocks in Years Two and Three (Queensland Department of Education, 1977a; 1977b). Supplementary booklets provide details of the phonics program, language and reading games, and songs and stories. Finally, a comprehensive overview of the entire three-year program has been published (Queensland Department of Education, 1979). This is undoubtedly the single most useful document prepared by project staff, and those interested in the Queensland program would be well advised to study it carefully prior to reading any of the other materials. It provides a particularly concise and coherent summary of the overall program, setting out its history, rationale, objectives and content in a clear and systematic format.



The Evaluation

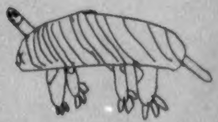
Evaluation of the Queensland project was based almost exclusively on standardized testing of the children. This seems rather surprising in view of the procedures used to develop the language program in the first place. A more logical approach would have been to collect further samples of each child's language in both natural and school settings, and to compare the subsequent linguistic analyses with the original concordances in order to assess: (a) the children's facility with standard English, (b) the ease with which they were switching between Aboriginal English and standard English, and (c) the effects of the program, if any, on the children's use of Aboriginal English in natural, out-of-school settings. This procedure was not adopted because of the high cost in terms of staff time and energy, and the concern that it would have slowed down the more important task of developing the program.

Nevertheless it is disappointing that no attempt seems to have been made to carry out further linguistic analyses following exposure to the program.

As with the other projects, it is also disappointing that no attempt was made to assess changes in parent and community attitudes, especially in view of the importance that was attached to this aspect of the project. Even the classroom assistant scheme does not appear to have been evaluated formally in any way.

The actual testing program commenced early in 1969 following the decision to use the complete intakes of five-year-olds at both schools in that year as comparison groups. These groups began school in the year preceding the implementation of the special program, and thus were exposed to the standard Queensland first grade curriculum. Their counterparts in the following year, 1970, comprised the initial experimental groups that were taught using the new language program. The limitations of this approach to evaluation were recognized, and realistic steps taken to implement it as effectively as possible:

> Because of the widely diversified environmental conditions operating in the various Aboriginal communities in Queensland, it was unrealistic to consider establishing strictly constituted control groups of children from communities other than the two from which the experimental groups were drawn . . .
>
> Since comparison and experimental groups were drawn from the same schools in two relatively small, integrated communities it was impossible to prevent some overflow of new ideas, techniques and enthusiasm from the teachers and children of the experimental groups to those of the comparison groups.
>
> Accordingly an attempt was made to create an enthusiastic learning and teaching environment for the comparison as well as experimental group children. A week's residential conference was held in 1969 in which all teachers from both Palm Island and Cherbourg schools participated. Seminars were held to discuss the special problems experienced by Aboriginal children in learning at school. New techniques and teaching materials were discussed, and subsequently provided for use in the schools. (Queensland Department of Education, 1972: 3–4)



A full report of the pre-testing of the 1969 and 1970 groups, and of the post-testing after both groups had attended school for one year, has been published by the Queensland Department of Education (1972). Unfortunately no further accounts of the ongoing evaluation have been published, and almost a decade later we are still left with only a very limited set of data on which to make an objective assessment of the project. There are no published data on the effectiveness of the second and third years of the special language program, nor have the results of testing subsequent experimental groups been published.

The testing program focused on two areas of ability: language competence and school achievement. The major instruments used to assess the former were the PPVT and the 10 basic sub-tests of the revised ITPA. A locally produced and standardized test of naming vocabulary, the Enticknap Picture Vocabulary Test, also was administered. This test consists of a set of pictures of objects which are presented singly to the child, who is then asked to name the object. Additionally, the project staff devised two simple tests of their own. The first was a sentence reproduction test which required the children to repeat after the examiner each of 15 sentences containing standard English vocabulary and linguistic structures. The second was an oral completion test in which the children examined a set of seven large coloured pictures one at a time, while the examiner asked particular questions about the picture.

Less attention was given to assessing school achievement. Two tests were used for post-testing of the samples: the Hull Word Recognition Test and a short, specially devised number test consisting of 10 items. A further three tests were used only to post-test the experimental groups: the Boehm Test of Basic Concepts, together with two specially devised tests of word and sentence recognition. Since the results of these latter three instruments can add nothing to the actual evaluation of the experimental program they will not be considered further.

Statistical analyses of the ITPA and vocabulary test results produced the following outcomes:

(i) The comparison and experimental groups within each community did not differ significantly at school entry on any of the ITPA sub-tests, on the ITPA total, nor on the PPVT. (These were the only instruments used for pre-testing both the experimental and the comparison groups.)

(ii) Using scaled scores based on the United States norms, analyses were made of changes in ITPA performance after one year at school. For both comparison groups there were gains on three sub-tests; these were significant for two (auditory reception and auditory association). Although the results showed losses on seven of the sub-tests, only three were significant: verbal and manual expression, and auditory sequential memory. In marked contrast, the experimental groups made significant gains on eight of the ten sub-tests. Greatest gains were recorded on the auditory and visual association sub-tests, and on verbal expression. The only areas in which significant improvement did not occur were visual closure and auditory sequential memory. It should be noted, however, that the children's pre-test performance on these two sub-tests already was equivalent to that of the United States normative sample.

(iii) Data from both communities were combined for the comparison and experimental groups separately, the subsequent analyses revealing that the experimental subjects obtained significantly higher scores on nine of the ten ITPA sub-tests, as well as on the test as a whole. The only exception was the auditory reception sub-test. As previously noted, this was one of the two sub-tests on which the comparison group made significant gains. The greatest difference between the groups occurred on the verbal expression sub-test, while other large differences were recorded on four of the visual-motor sub-tests.

(iv) A detailed analysis was made of responses to the grammatic closure sub-tests, and the following conclusions drawn:

> . . . [The] children still experienced difficulty with many standard English structures after one year at school. However, the compensatory language programme was more effective than the standard Queensland programme in improving the children's competence with plural *-s*, present tense *-ing*, and the superlative form *-est*. (Queensland Department of Education, 1972: 48)

(v) Comparisons between the groups indicated no significant differences on the PPVT or the Enticknap Picture Vocabulary Test after one year at school, and it was concluded that the experimental program had not had a differential effect on the children's expressive and receptive vocabularies.

The results of testing using the remaining instruments are of more limited value because of the lack of pre-test data. Some tests were used at school entry only with the experimental groups, others were not used at all. It therefore is not possible to determine whether significant post-test differences also were in evidence at school entry, nor is it possible to compare gains across the two groups. The following summary highlights the basic outcomes of this further testing:

(i) On both the sentence and oral reproduction tests the experimental groups made statistically significant gains. For the former test, the post-test comparisons indicated no significant differences between the experimental and comparison subjects. On the latter, however, the results were quite the opposite, with the experimental groups performing at a significantly higher level in both communities.

(ii) The Hull Word Recognition Test and the number test were not used for pre-testing, nor were they used to post-test the Palm Island comparison group. Statistical analysis of the Cherbourg data, however, shows that the experimental subjects scored significantly higher than the comparison group on both tests.

In general, a review of the overall test results suggests that during 1970 the first year of the experimental language program had a very substantial effect on the children at Cherbourg and Palm Island. Superior performance was evident in most of the areas of language competence and school achievement that were measured. As previously stressed, however, it is disappointing that so little data from the Queensland project has been published. It appears that members of the project committee have been so sure of the success of the program that they have not felt it necessary to expend further time and energy on this aspect of the research. The children's progress has continued to be monitored, but only to locate inadequacies in the program and thereby feed specific improvements and modifications back into it. Testing and data analysis therefore have been oriented to program development rather than the production of research reports. Nevertheless, sufficient data apparently have been collected and analysed to show that the overall gains made by the 1970 experimental group at Cherbourg have been sustained, not only as they moved through the subsequent two years of the experimental program, but also as they progressed through the remaining grades of primary school. At Palm Island the gains have been maintained only in the oral language area, and not in the children's reading abilities. Further data have become available during 1980 in a confidential report prepared by Betty Watts. Unfortunately, however, the present writers have not been allowed access to it. At this stage, then, despite continued testing of the children, there is no way of telling how much more effective the program has become as a result of its ongoing extension and improvement.

Julia Koppe is the one person who has retained a strong commitment to the continuing evaluation of the project, despite a very heavy workload elsewhere. She has summarized the basic research outcomes in the following way:

> The results show more than just a significant improvement by the experimental groups. The distribution itself is quite different. The performance of the comparison groups had led us to expect a pattern whereby most children were low achievers. This did not happen. With the experimental groups we have begun to see a more normal distribution of performance. In fact, the general pattern has become one of skewing towards the top end of the distribution, whereas the typical pattern used to be the opposite.
>
> We didn't really influence the very high achieving children; their performance has been much the same across both the experimental and comparison groups. It is the children in the average and below average range who really have gained some benefit from the experimental programme.
>
> There has been an interesting pattern with the children who had fairly severe hearing problems in the early stages. Many of them made slow progress in reading for the first couple of years. However by providing a very supportive programme together with extra auditory activities some very considerable shifts have occurred in their general patterns of performance, and they now are achieving at a most acceptable level. (Interview, 1976)

In summary, it is clear, despite the relative dearth of published data, that the Queensland project has been very successful in improving the school performance of the children at Cherbourg, and to a lesser extent has improved performance, in some areas at least, at Palm Island.

Having reviewed the formal evaluation of the project we turn now to a more subjective assessment of the project's overall influence.

The Achievements

Although outside funding was phased out during 1973, the Queensland project has been an ongoing activity which has become fully integrated with the continuing program of Aboriginal education in the Queensland Department of Education. In the years immediately following 1973, however, there was a distinct slowing down in the momentum of the project, probably because the language program no longer required such intensive development and support. This was unfortunate for at least two reasons. First, the project already had acted as a catalyst to change the whole direction of Aboriginal education in Queensland (and to varying degrees in other States as well), and it was most desirable that it continue to play an effective role. Second, additional funding from federal government sources would have been readily available between 1973 and 1975, and another major thrust at that stage would have consolidated and strengthened the project considerably. Instead, momentum was lost due to staff changes and involvement in wider dissemination, and it was not until 1977–78 that the impetus was restored with the publication of the second and third year programs and the development of in-service kits for teachers. It is clear that the project now is moving ahead strongly once again, and that several very important and lasting contributions have been made.

First, the project has demonstrated that a carefully planned and well-taught program, especially designed in terms of the needs, abilities and cultural background of its participants, can result in significantly improved levels of cognitive growth in Aboriginal children. It demonstrated at Cherbourg, in fact, that Aboriginal children are capable of achieving academically at the same level as their white counterparts.

Second, quite remarkable changes have taken place in the attitudes and expectations of teachers working in project schools. The project provided teachers with clear evidence that Aboriginal children do have something worthwhile to say, that they can think, and that they are capable of success in the classroom.

Third, as a result of the above two outcomes, the project has acted as a catalyst to change the whole direction of Aboriginal education in Queensland. Ten years ago Aboriginal schools were an educational backwater, and attempts to improve the situation were meeting with little success. The schools also were a professional backwater for teachers, and offered little scope for job satisfaction, status and promotion. The situation now has largely been reversed. As Norman Alford expresses it:

> There is no doubt that the project opened up a new deal for Aboriginal children. Had we not undertaken the project at that stage I'm sure we would have gone ahead spending vast sums of money and doing the same old thing . . . and that we would not have achieved anything educationally at all. The big achievement is that the project made people address themselves to the root cause and attack the problem at that level. (Interview, 1976)

Because the program was so successful it transformed the mood of teachers from one of hopelessness to one of enthusiasm and commitment, and hence Aboriginal schools have become more stimulating and sought-after places in which to work. In turn, the tone of the schools has become increasingly positive and creative.

Fourth, at a more tangible level, the program itself represents a substantial achievement. In particular, the first year language program as published in the three project handbooks (Queensland Department of Education, 1971, 1973a, 1973b) has received wide acclaim. Betty Watts, for example, has had this to say about it:

> . . . its major value is that it is a very good infant programme. The sequence of the structures that were built into the programme came directly from the research discovery of the discrepancies between standard English and Aboriginal English. Its basic teaching premises of experience learning, of fostering self esteem, of encouraging the flow of verbal expression, are sound infant teaching practices. Its notion of trying to integrate the educational experiences across the curriculum is again very good teaching practice. (Interview, 1976)

The first-year project handbooks have been very widely distributed throughout Queensland, not only to Aboriginal schools, but also to schools attended predominantly or even solely by white children. Hundreds of copies also have found their way into libraries and schools outside Queensland. In total, it is estimated that 3500 sets of the handbooks have been distributed throughout Australia. Additionally, staff of the Queensland project have been involved in in-service conferences in other States where the program has been introduced. In South Australia, for example, copies of the handbooks have been placed in all Aboriginal schools, and during 1975 John Dwyer led an intensive three-day workshop in Adelaide that was attended by representatives (including Aboriginal teacher aides) from each school. Similar in-service activities have been conducted in Western Australia, New South Wales and the Northern Territory.

Staff of the Queensland project, however, have expressed some concern about the wide distribution and use of the handbooks. They contend that the program is more than just a curriculum package, that it has emerged as a new system, as a new approach to Aboriginal education. As the program has spread, it has become increasingly impossible to communicate the underlying philosophy to its users, and so it has been modified: some teachers have put their own interpretations on it, others have become lazy and taken 'short-cuts', while others again have just used bits and pieces of it in a random fashion. Norman Alford, for example, feels that the wider dissemination of the program has become 'a good idea out of control':

> Once it spreads too far people do not embrace the heart of the exercise, but only the suprficialities. These are the people who take short cuts because they don't really know what it is all about. (Interview, 1976)

Fifth, the above criticism notwithstanding, staff of the Queensland project have achieved considerable success in communicating the underlying philosophy of the project. And herein lies another major outcome, for the language program has had a wide influence on curriculum development generally in Queensland.

(i) Many of the basic ideas and approaches have filtered into the pre-school curriculum. In Aboriginal pre-schools a downward extension of the program has been developed and is being taught with considerable effectiveness in some centres. There is clear evidence also of the program's influence in ordinary pre-schools, especially in the greater emphasis being placed on experiential learning and language development.

(ii) Project staff had a very substantial input when a new language arts syllabus was developed for use in all primary schools throughout the State. The philosophy of the new syllabus therefore is very close indeed to the philosophy of the van Leer program. In this way the project has had a significant impact on the education of *all* primary school children in Queensland.

(iii) More recently a special task force has been formed by the Queensland Department of Education to develop an upward extension of the language program for Aboriginal children in grades four to seven. The basic framework and philosophy will remain, the new syllabus simply being a continuation and further development of the old. It is hoped eventually to extend this syllabus through the first three years of secondary school, with an increasing emphasis on language function, as well as a continuing concern with the form and structure of language.

Sixth, the program is having a substantial impact on curriculum development at the national level following the establishment of a major project to devise English language teaching materials for Aboriginal children and adults. The project was initiated at the beginning of 1978 by the Curriculum Development Centre, a national organization based in Canberra and supported by the federal government. The aim of the project is to develop resources for an integrated language and reading program for all levels of Aboriginal education from pre-school to adult. Phase one of the project involved the national trialling and evaluation of existing materials, the Queensland van Leer program being one of the two curriculum packages selected for this purpose. Phase two of the project was begun during 1980 and involved the preparation of curriculum modules. Loueen Scott, co-ordinator of the project, reported (interview, 1980) that these modules reflected some of the basic approaches of the van Leer program; i.e. in their strong emphasis on rhythm and intonation, in the use of puppets, and in their constant awareness of sounds through the use of jingles, songs, etc. As a result of the trialling, however, it was felt necessary to support the program by providing more supplementary materials for teachers. Visual resources seemed especially necessary, and so a number of sets of language stimulus pictures were being developed to accompany the modules.

Seventh, the project also has had an influence on the preparation of teachers in Queensland, not only via the intensive in-service work amongst teachers in Aboriginal schools, but at the pre-service level also. Several of the colleges now have courses, or major segments of courses, that are built around the objectives, rationale and content of the program, and considerable numbers of beginning teachers in Queensland are thus gaining exposure to the project and its philosophy before they embark on their teaching careers. For experienced teachers, the Townsville College of Advanced Education offers a one-year full-time diploma course in Aboriginal education that is very heavily based on the program, approximately half of the content being taught by Julia Koppe, who is now a full-time lecturer at the college.

Finally, the project has succeeded in improving communication between teachers and Aborigines. Although more could still be achieved in this area, it is clear that the project has had a positive influence on interrelationships between Aboriginal communities and white teachers. Parents now feel accepted in most schools, while teachers have become more at ease in relating to them. A major influence here has been the classroom assistant scheme that brought Aboriginal people into the school on a regular, paid basis. Their involvement undoubtedly served as a bridge between school and community, so much so that in some centres the Aboriginal people now see the school as an integral part of their community, and not something separate from it.

This is a long and impressive list of project achievements that requires only one more addition. Unfortunately, however, that addition is not yet available. We refer, of course, to the lack of published research results. The formal evaluation of the project has been a disappointing feature, both for its emphasis on testing and for the absence of any published data since 1972. Reliance on word-of-mouth reports of findings is simply not good enough in a project of this size and scope. It is hoped that senior staff of the Queensland Department of Education will provide the necessary support for prompt publication of all remaining research data, thus rounding off what undoubtedly has been one of the most successful and significant undertakings in the history of Aboriginal education.

9

The Projects in Retrospect

The preceding six chapters have examined in detail the projects under review. We turn now to a retrospective appraisal of the projects, looking at their immediate impact upon the field of Aboriginal education, and at the longer-term outcomes and achievements.

Despite their wide differences in rationale and approach, the projects did share a common starting point: the belief that some form of early childhood provision offered the best solution to the intransigent problem of school failure amongst Aboriginal children. Particularly during the early years, staff of the various projects approached their task with vigour and excitement, believing that at long last they were doing something effective to improve the lot of Aboriginal Australians. These were heady days of action, innovation, vigorous debate, and occasionally heated disagreement. Staff responded to the challenge with commitment and enthusiasm, working long hours, often under arduous conditions. The projects at this time were in a state of flux. Each underwent a process of change and development – even the basic aims and philosophies were relatively fluid, especially during the early stages. In examining the changes that occurred, it is clear that there were several major influences that shaped the direction taken by each project:

Practical Problems of Implementation

It is not surprising that staff had difficulty in translating their objectives into practice. They were faced, of course, with all the usual problems of action-research: too much pressure to achieve results quickly; poor communication between project staff; failure to specify objectives and methodology clearly and without ambiguity; the conflicting demands of human need versus research design; failure of staff to agree to work together in a common direction; and so on. Additionally, however, they were faced with problems of distance, climate and cultural adaptation. Field staff often were placed under intolerable strain by the need to produce positive outcomes whilst working in isolated and physically enervating conditions. Imagine, for example, the discomfort of working in an unlined galvanized iron building at Marree where summer temperatures consistently exceed 38°C (100°F), and sometimes climb to 49°C (120°F). Or imagine the problems faced by city-trained teachers seeking to adjust sensitively to the culture and life style of the Aboriginal people at Palm Island or Katherine. Inevitably the pressures on field staff created problems of staff turnover, and the recruitment and induction of new personnel resulted in considerable delay and discontinuity.

Distance created its own set of difficulties. Bourke, Palm Island, Marree, Ernabella, and the country AFECs in New South Wales were all many hundreds of kilometres away from the administrative bases of their respective projects, and direct communication often was slow, time-consuming and expensive. Lex Grey, for example, speaks of the effort involved for Aboriginal people in visiting Sydney for AFEC council meetings: 'That effort for most representatives was exhausting, so that some hardly even managed to attend the council meetings once they arrived' (Grey, 1974: 246). In South Australia, project staff regularly made a 3500 kilometre round trip to visit Marree and Ernabella, travel alone occupying five days of exhausting driving over rough gravel roads and bush tracks. It is no wonder that field staff in these places became frustrated by administrative delays, and often complained of neglect by city-based staff whom they felt did not understand the practical problems of working in such isolated situations.

The practical problems that were encountered undoubtedly influenced the direction taken by each project. Objectives were modified, plans altered, and some expectations were not realized.

Interaction between the Projects

Another source of change arose from interaction between the projects. Staff from the various projects did not work in isolation from each other. They generally were familiar with one another's work, and many had visited at least one or two of the other projects. The people from the four van Leer projects came together in 1969 and again in 1971 for Foundation-sponsored meetings. They not only shared information about their respective projects, but had the opportunity to debate wider issues concerning the early education of minority group children. Several other common links also provided opportunities for interchange: a member of the South Australian project committee (A.J. Whitelaw) held a key position on the interdepartmental committee that planned and guided the Katherine project; Lex Grey served as a consultant to the Victorian and South Australian projects; staff of the South Australian project carried out the independent post-testing at Bourke from 1972 to 1974; Betty Watts, a key member of the Queensland committee, carried out a major review of the New South Wales project; Lex Grey did likewise at Bourke; and so on.

All of these interactions between the projects undoubtedly provided a stimulus for debate, review and modification. In general, the interactions seem to have had a moderating influence, most projects tending to converge slightly in their philosophies and approaches as time went by. There was one exception to this trend, however. Staff of the New South Wales project retained a strong commitment to their initial approach, external criticism and comment only serving to strengthen their support of the AFEC ideology.

Interestingly, as time went by the AFEC movement came to have an increasingly pervasive influence on most other projects. Worldwide educational trends away from notions of deficit and compensation and towards parent education and family support undoubtedly contributed to the growing influence of the New South Wales project. Nevertheless, Lex Grey's very strong personal commitment to the AFEC philosophy also played an important role. He spoke and wrote frequently and with great conviction, and his message attracted increasing attention from staff of the other projects.

Political Change

During the life of the projects the field of Aboriginal affairs moved from a relative political backwater to a position of some prominence. In fact, it became something of a political hot potato, with quite acrimonious debate occurring from time to time, especially during election years. The move into the political limelight was part of a more general reawakening of social conscience in Australia, and served to focus greater attention on those people already working in the field. It also served, of course, to stimulate substantial increases in government spending on Aboriginal affairs.

The effects on the six projects are difficult to assess. Greater interest was taken, visitors arrived with increasing frequency, and supplementary funding became more readily available. Furthermore, interaction was not just one-way. Increasing prominence gave project staff wider opportunity to influence developments in the field of Aboriginal education generally. For example, a national workshop on Aboriginal education was sponsored by the federal government during 1971, and its recommendations helped to frame government policy. Representatives from all six projects attended, and a careful analysis of the final report shows that they played an important role in shaping the outcomes of the workshop.

Changing Attitudes

Associated with the widening interest in Aboriginal affairs was a strong move away from an assimilationist philosophy to one of integration, and eventually beyond that to the beginnings of the self-determination movement. A new attitude of respect for Aboriginal culture and lifestyle was developing, together with a new appreciation of the positive and unique contribution that Aborigines could make to Australian society. It seems probable that some of the stimulus for these changes in attitude and philosophy stemmed directly from the work of the six projects under review. In turn, it is clear that the changes had a positive impact on the projects: staff were encouraged to provide greater opportunity for Aborigines to express viewpoints and participate in decision making; community attitudes became more favourable, thus providing an increasingly supportive environment in which to work, and the general feeling that the tide was turning – that an Aboriginal resurgence was imminent – gave fresh impetus to the endeavours of project staff.

Worldwide Trends

Wider international developments also contributed to changing emphases and approaches. By the early 1970s psychologists were questioning seriously many of the assumptions underlying the compensatory approach, and there was a strong backlash to notions of cultural deprivation and linguistic deficit. Correspondingly, there was a new emphasis on the cultural integrity of ethnic minority groups, and notions of cultural pluralism began replacing those of cultural disadvantage. The work of linguists such as Labov and Baratz into non-standard forms of English made a particular contribution through its emphasis on the functional integrity of minority group dialects. The influence of changing trends such as these inevitably filtered through to Australian educationists, and led to reappraisal and reorientation of some programs, and to a broadening and clarification of the theoretical bases of others.

Summary

Most of the projects underwent considerable change and development, especially during the early stages. By 1971, however, a fairly clear pattern had become established, and it is possible to identify the basic features of the projects at this time. The summary table in Figure 17 sets out the main characteristics at about the midpoint of each project (i.e. 1971–72), thus providing a useful framework for examining their progress and achievements.

PROJECT	ADMINISTRATIVE BASE	PRINCIPAL SOURCES OF FUNDING	DURATION	APPROXIMATE AGE LEVELS OF CHILDREN	BASIC APPROACH	MAJOR PRACTICAL OUTCOME
Bourke	Department of Psychiatry, University of New South Wales	(i) Private enterprise (ii) Australian Government	1969 – continuing	4 to 5 years	Compensatory education. A structured pre-school program designed to enrich children's language, number and conceptual development.	Establishment of an on-going pre-school for Aboriginal and white children in Bourke.
New South Wales	Department of Adult Education, University of Sydney	(i) van Leer Foundation (ii) NSW and Australian Governments	1969 – 1974	0 to 5 years	Family education. Parents given support and training so that they could be fellow learners with each other and with their children.	Establishment of the NSW AFEC Federation as an all Aboriginal organisation concerned with developing Aboriginal identity via programs of family education.
Victoria	Faculty of Education, Monash University	(i) van Leer Foundation (ii) Victorian Government	1969 – 1972	2 to 5 years	No firm commitment to any one approach. Home based teaching sessions conducted by trained teachers became the predominant pattern.	A series of basic recommendations regarding the provision of early childhood services to the Aboriginal people of Victoria.
South Australia	School of Social Sciences, Flinders University	van Leer Foundation	1969 – 1971	3 to 5 years	Compensatory education, with an attempt to incorporate family education in a conventional pre-school setting.	Close liaison with the SA Department of Education in the establishment of both pre-schools as ongoing ventures.
Katherine	Committee representing various government departments	Australian Government	1970 – 1973	4 to 8+ years	A broad-based attack on the problem of school failure, with emphasis on communication skills, home-school liaison, health care, and community involvement.	Substantial improvement in the quality of schooling at all levels in the Katherine community.
Queensland	Queensland Department of Education	(i) van Leer Foundation (ii) Queensland Government	1969 – continuing	5 to 8 years	Language development via an elaborate and carefully sequenced program of instruction covering the first three years of formal schooling.	The production of a language program incorporating all other aspects of the school curriculum in an integrated approach.

Figure 17 Basic features of the six projects

Outcomes and Achievements

The most logical starting point for a consideration of outcomes is the evaluation made by personnel of each project. Although all of the projects had a research component, however, evaluation generally was their most disappointing feature. It seems that so much time and energy were expended on program development and implementation that formal evaluation was squeezed in almost as an afterthought, or because it was required by funding authorities. Thus, while the label 'action-research' was attached to most of the projects, it is clear that the 'action' took the limelight, and the research a relatively minor role. Furthermore most researchers adopted an unimaginative approach to evaluation, making little effort to develop procedures and instruments that suited their particular needs. Lex Grey, for example, seemed more concerned to criticize conventional techniques than to develop other systematic forms of assessment that dovetailed with AFEC philosophies, while staff of most other projects seemed quite content to follow the well-trodden path of psychometric testing. In fact, evaluation of most of the projects was based almost exclusively on individual testing of children using instruments that had been developed and standardized with white populations in North America. The various project reports indicate that staff were well aware of the limitations of such an approach. Scott and Darbyshire (1973: 80), for example, made the following points:

> Further, the psychological testing of pre-school age children is a hazardous proceeding, and that of children deemed to be in need of special educational intervention programmes even more so. To our knowledge, no research study of the experimental effects of pre-school education programmes has taken up the problem of validity of the initial assessment of children . . .
>
> With the additional problem of interpreting the educational relevance of test results and problems of reliability of scores over time, it seems at this time that the main contribution of psychological tests to pre-school education is the information yielded, at one point in time, on the relative progress of aspects of learning considered of educational relevance.

Despite paying lip-service to the hazards of psychometric testing, however, project staff made relatively meagre attempts to find alternatives. None of the projects came to grips with the question of objective assessment in the affective and attitudinal domains, despite the strong emphasis given to these when specifying aims. Thus most projects made no systematic attempt to measure changes in children's self-concept and emotional stability. Instead, staff limited their evaluations to the areas of language and cognition, the two most favoured instruments being the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities.

Finally, minimal attention generally was given to questions of research design and to the limitations of statistical techniques when processing test data. Puristic researchers could readily take exception to many of the approaches and procedures that were used, and undoubtedly would claim little validity and reliability for any of the research outcomes because of the numerous design imperfections. In this regard it is surprising that the Bernard van Leer Foundation did not insist upon a more systematic approach to evaluation in the four projects that it funded, and that it did not provide project staff with more support and guidance in this area.

Given the generally low level of research output, what can be concluded about project achievements on the basis of objectively measured outcomes? The answer is simple: very little indeed. The only reliable conclusion one can draw is that the activities of the Bourke, Victorian, South Australian and Queensland projects enhanced the language and/or cognitive development of the children participating, at least in the short term. And even this conclusion can be supported only to the extent that one is prepared to accept assessment procedures based almost exclusively on standardized testing. There is no firm evidence of the persistence of these language and cognitive gains beyond the first three or four years of schooling, nor have any data been published on the longer term effects of the projects on school achievement generally.

Seen from any perspective these are meagre outcomes. They represent a poor return for the hundreds of thousands of dollars invested in the projects, and an even poorer return for the amount of human effort expended. Yet the problem lies with the research, and not with the projects themselves. It is clear to the present writers that the lack of objectively measured outcomes is *not* the result of ineffective programs, but of ineffective and incomplete evaluation. The story becomes more encouraging, therefore, when one turns to a wider and more subjective review of project achievements. These will be considered in relation to the children, schools, parents, teachers, programs, and community.

The Children

In addition to the research evidence noted above, staff of all six projects reported that their programs had positive effects on the children's general academic and social development. Benefits accruing to the children who participated in the various projects included one or more of the following: easier and more rapid adjustment to formal schooling; behaviour at school less shy and withdrawn; clearer and more fluent speech; improvements in general health and nutrition; more effective socialization with peers and adults; and more regular attendance at school. Although the evidence for these improvements is based largely on impressionistic reporting, there is little reason to doubt that the majority of children who participated in the projects did benefit in some way. In particular, it seems likely that involvement in the projects enhanced their performance at school, at least in the early years.

The Schools

An important outcome of some projects was the actual establishment of early childhood facilities in particular locations: the Bourke pre-school, the New South Wales family education centres, and the two pre-schools in South Australia. Additionally the project at Katherine led to the consolidation of pre-school facilities there, and to the wider participation of Aboriginal parents and children, while the schools at Cherbourg and Palm Island received a substantial input of physical and human resources as a direct result of being selected as bases for the Queensland project. While bricks and mortar are not necessarily a good criterion of success, the provision of physical facilities certainly enhanced the opportunity for many Aboriginal children to participate in early childhood programs. The centres themselves therefore should not be overlooked as achievements in their own right.

The Parents

All projects made some attempt to involve parents in their programs, believing that this would enhance parental understanding of child development and thus contribute to a more educative home environment. The New South Wales project, however, was the only one that had a prime commitment to parental involvement right from the start. The others soon began to follow suit, although none went as far as New South Wales in offering full parental responsibility. Staff of the Victorian project, for example, moved almost exclusively to home-based teaching sessions during their final year, while at Bourke a home visiting program was introduced in order to consolidate the work of the pre-school.

It appears that the projects were successful in achieving their objectives in this area. Subjective reports indicate increasing levels of parental participation, more openness in discussions between parents and teachers, a greater interest in the educational program, and more co-operation in ensuring prompt and regular attendance by children. In the longer term, once children had left the projects, parents became less fearful about making contact with their child's teachers. In Swan Hill, for example, teachers believe that greater willingness amongst Aboriginal parents to visit schools and discuss their children's progress can be attributed directly to the influence of the project.

The Teachers

Reports from the Victorian, Katherine and Queensland projects highlighted personal growth amongst teachers as a significant achievement. It was felt that teachers' attitudes and perceptions underwent positive change, making them more sensitive to the needs of their Aboriginal pupils. This had a ripple effect as teachers interacted with colleagues in other shools, or were transferred to other locations. Positive effects also accrued when project preschools (e.g. Bourke and Cherbourg) were used for practice teaching purposes by training institutions.

The Programs

Another important outcome for some projects was the production of a teaching program that could be adapted for use in other contexts. In South Australia, for example, the pre-school programs prepared by project staff were used as a foundation for the curriculum in the other Aboriginal pre-schools in that State. The various experimental programs at Bourke also were important achievements, although it is disappointing that they have never been published and so have not been used widely. The Queensland language program, of course, represents a very important achievement indeed. As noted in the previous chapter, the first year handbooks have been distributed throughout Australia and have been used in a variety of early childhood contexts, both Aboriginal and white. Likewise the parent workbooks of the New South Wales project have attracted considerable interest, along with the supplementary tapes, slides and discussion booklets.

The Community

Written into the objectives of most projects was the goal of family and community development. It is difficult to assess the impact in this area, however, for none of the projects attempted any systematic evaluation, and follow-up reports were particularly anecdotal and subjective. The New South Wales project undoubtedly did have an important influence on local communities, for enrichment in this area was at the core of its philosophy. Ross (1973), in his review of the New South Wales project, identified AFEC as an incipient social movement with the potential to integrate communities, strengthen the morale of the group, and allow increasing self-determination. Follow-up discussions with the leaders of the AFEC Federation confirm that this potential is being realized in some communities as Aboriginal people become more confident in themselves and accept responsibility for their own affairs.

The main contribution of other projects lay in the development of Aboriginal teacher aide schemes. Faced with the problem of school-community liaison, Aboriginal people were employed to work in the schools as classroom assistants. At the Bourke pre-school, for example, the Aboriginal aides consistently have provided a strong and effective link with the local community. In Queensland, supplementary funding was obtained to develop a classroom assistant scheme which proved to be singularly successful in strengthening school-community bonds, so much so that it soon became implemented in all Aboriginal schools throughout the State.

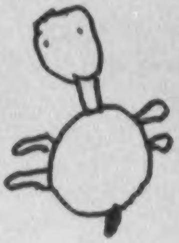
Conclusion

Despite limited research evidence it is clear that the projects made an important contribution to the lives of the children and parents who participated, as well as sensitizing teachers to the culture and lifestyle of the Aboriginal people, and encouraging greater community awareness and involvement in the work of the schools. Additionally, the establishment of facilities and the development of teaching programs may be viewed as important outcomes in their own right.

Having summarized the major outcomes of the projects, we turn next to their wider impact on the field of Aboriginal education.

The Wider Influence

A full assessment of the influence of the projects requires some understanding of major developments in the field of Aboriginal education since 1968. It will be recalled from Chapter 2 that relatively slow progress was being made during the 1960s, especially in the provision of pre-school education. In Western Australia, for example, the number of Aboriginal children attending pre-school centres throughout the whole State in 1968 amounted to only 25 (Jones, in Victorian Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, 1973). In Victoria the numbers were even lower, and by 1971 there were still only 12 Aboriginal children attending subsidized kindergartens (Worthy, in Victorian Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, 1973). Only in the Northern Territory was there a glimmer of light. The federal government was providing considerable financial support, a relatively innovatory program had been developed (Gilbert, 1962), and by 1967 over 250 Aboriginal children were being enrolled each year in Northern Territory pre-schools (Dunn and Tatz, 1969).



In the early 1970s the situation changed dramatically when the federal government began making funds available to the States for Aboriginal pre-school education. State authorities were invited to submit plans for the phasing in of pre-school facilities for all Aboriginal children over a five-year period, funding being provided for the construction of buildings and the employment of advisory teachers. There was a flurry of activity as submissions

Table 1 Expansion of pre-school facilities for Aborigines in Western Australia, 1968-73

Year	*Number enrolled*
1968	25
1971	89
1972	426
1973	658

(Adapted from Jones, in Victoria, Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 1973)

were prepared, buildings planned, teachers appointed, and the inevitable administrative machinery set up. The most rapid expansion occurred during 1972 and 1973, the data in Table 1 from Western Australia indicating just how extensive was the growth that took place.

Similar expansion took place in other States. In South Australia, for example, the state Education Department accepted full responsibility for Aboriginal pre-school education, and by the end of 1972 facilities had been established in all major Aboriginal communities, an Aboriginal teacher aide scheme had been devised and implemented, and a full-time pre-school advisor appointed. In Victoria the number of Aboriginal children attending kindergartens rose from 12 in 1971 to 109 in 1973, and by the end of 1973 20 Aboriginal assistants were being employed in kindergartens in various centres throughout the State (Worthy, in Victorian Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 1973).

During the following years there was continued expansion and consolidation, and by 1980 pre-school provisions were available for most Aboriginal children in Australia. Although these provisions vary in their nature and extent from State to State, they share a number of common features: (a) Parental and community involvement is strongly encouraged. Devolution of responsibility to parents, however, has not occurred, except in isolated instances. (b) Programming is fairly traditional and conservative, the primary aim being to prepare children for formal schooling. Nevertheless, programs increasingly have reflected a sensitivity to Aboriginal culture, language and lifestyle. (c) The employment of Aboriginal teacher aides is an established feature of most preschools.

Having summarized the major trends of the past decade, two basic questions arise: What influence have the six projects had on the above developments? And what has been achieved as a result of all this activity?

The expansion of Aboriginal pre-school facilities was the direct result of a change in federal government policy. At some stage during 1970 or early 1971 a decision was taken to collaborate with the States by providing funds for capital developments and for some resource personnel. The real motivation for government decisions of this kind is seldom revealed. In this case the 1967 referendum had paved the way by giving the federal government power to act in the field of Aboriginal welfare, but specific reasons for the decision only can be surmised. In Australia at that time there was growing social concern about the inadequacy of welfare provisions for Aborigines in the fields of health, housing and education. Furthermore, within educational and social welfare circles there was a great deal of interest in early childhood services, most professionals believing this to be the logical starting point for action. It therefore was politically expedient for the government to act as it did, and the move attracted a good deal of favourable publicity.

What role did the projects play in these developments? It is noteworthy that during this period there were no other undertakings of similar size or scope in the fields of Aboriginal education and welfare. The six projects together provided the major innovative thrust, and therefore attracted considerable interest. They were a practical demonstration of the kinds of development that most professionals thought desirable.

The present writers believe the projects served two functions at this time: they accelerated government action in the field of Aboriginal education; and they focused interest at the early childhood level. Undoubtedly the government would have acted even had the projects not existed, but developments might not have been so rapid, nor so strongly directed to the pre-school. Few governments are likely to stand by and let private enterprise gain all the kudos from an apparently successful venture. In this particular instance there were several ventures succeeding in the same field, there was strong professional interest and support, and there was pressure from other groups seeking funding for similar endeavours. It seems inevitable, therefore, that the projects did provide some of the impetus for government involvement.

The projects also had a wider role to play during this period of rapid expansion:

(i) They stimulated debate about underlying issues and philosophies, forcing people to think more deeply about their own approach to the early education of Aboriginal children. The widely divergent philosophies of the Bourke and New South Wales projects, for example, attracted a great deal of interest amongst educationists. Staff of the two projects were strongly committed to their respective viewpoints, and one could not read their writings and view their documentary films without being challenged to clarify one's own beliefs and adopt a personal stance towards the issues involved.

(ii) The teaching programs developed within some projects had an important influence on curriculum development in Aboriginal education. As previously noted, the Queensland language program soon became adopted in Aboriginal schools throughout the State, and also had a major impact on the language arts curriculum for all primary schools in Queensland. Curricula for Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia likewise were influenced quite strongly by the Queensland program, and some use also was made of the parent education materials developed by Lex Grey in New South Wales.

(iii) Project schools in Queensland, South Australia and Bourke were amongst the first in Australia to use Aboriginal teacher aides in a systematic way. It seems likely, therefore, that these projects helped to accelerate the adoption of this scheme across the country.

(iv) As pre-school facilities for Aboriginal children expanded around Australia, the involvement of parents became one of the more prominent features. The present writers believe this can be attributed in part to the influence of the New South Wales project. As noted in Chapter 4, Lex Grey had succeeded in implementing a parent-based program just before parental participation achieved popularity as an educational movement in Australia. He therefore was providing a practical demonstration at a most propitious time, and though few people fully understood his philosophy, and fewer still were prepared to accept his concept of complete parental responsibility, his work did stimulate wide interest in the idea of parents sharing in the activities of the pre-school.

(v) Finally, the projects must have had at least a slight influence on the process of attitude change within Australia. During the past decade there has been a growing recognition of the integrity of minority cultures* and an increased awareness of the contribution that Aborigines can make to Australian society. The staff of most projects themselves went through this process of attitude change, developing a deeper appreciation of Aboriginal culture and lifeways, and thus becoming increasingly sensitive and supportive in their work with Aboriginal people. Positive attitudes undoubtedly were communicated in project writings, films, radio broadcasts, public lectures, etc., as well as in day-to-day contacts with people in the various communities. The projects also were studied in detail by students in many teacher training institutions, hopefully providing new insights and understanding.

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*An important influence here has been the multi-cultural education movement which has been developing rapidly in Australia European migrant groups have played an important role in stimulating this development.

In summary, it is clear that the projects to varying degrees did have an influence on the field of Aboriginal education, particularly during the 1970s when the pre-school movement was developing at such a rapid rate. But what has been achieved as a result of all this activity? Has it solved the problem of school failure amongst Aboriginal children?

The simple answer to the latter question is no. The latest research findings are quite clear: Aboriginal children are still not succeeding in the Australian school system. This evidence comes from a national study of the literacy and numeracy skills of Australian children conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research. The study assessed the performance of representative samples of 10- and 14-year-old students 'on a variety of tasks considered important for progress through the school system or for everyday life in Australia' (Bourke and Parkin, 1977: 131). Aboriginal students from all States and Territories were included in the samples, the research design ensuring that every Aboriginal student in Australia who was in the appropriate age groups had the same probability of being selected. The results have been summarized as follows:

> For some tasks [the Aboriginal students'] level of performance approached that of the overall Australian samples, although, on average, their performance was 15 to 25 per cent below that of Australian students overall. These students live in situations which require that they be literate; a tribal lifestyle is not often a possible alternative for them. While it is pleasing to note that the majority of these students could perform most of the tasks . . . nevertheless, their performance was considerably below that of Australian students overall. Whatever the reasons are, many of these Aboriginal students throughout Australia are not achieving adequate levels of basic literacy and numeracy necessary for what is considered to be a 'normal' life in this country. (Bourke and Parkin, 1977: 153)

Research evidence such as this tells only part of the story, however. While the problem of school failure has not been solved, considerable progress has been made towards a solution, especially at the early childhood level. It would be totally unrealistic to expect such a major problem to be overcome in the short space of 10 or 12 years; indeed it may be unrealistic ever to expect a complete solution. In retrospect, the degree of progress during the past decade has been impressive. In 1970 relatively few Aboriginal children were attending pre-schools, there was a minimal government support, and programs generally were watered-down versions of the traditional pre-school curriculum for middle-class white children. By 1980 pre-school facilities were available for most Aboriginal children, the state and federal governments had accepted a major funding role, parent and community involvement had become an established feature of most pre-schools, and programs increasingly were dovetailing in with the culture and lifestyle of local Aboriginal communities. Considerable improvements also had taken place in the quality of primary schooling, especially in the early grades.

In summary, then, the present writers believe that more progress has taken place in the early childhood education of Aboriginal Australians since 1970 than took place during the whole period of white settlement prior to that time. Furthermore, they believe that each of the six projects to varying degrees influenced the nature and extent of the progress that occurred. Without the projects, developments probably would have been slower, less innovative, and less parent and community oriented.

Looking Ahead

Despite the progress that has been made, there is still room for improvement in the provision of early childhood services to Aboriginal Australians. In particular, early education is still too ethnocentric; it is still being offered to the Aboriginal people largely on white man's terms. As noted in the review of the AFEC movement (see Chapter 4), federal government authorities seem disinclined to support the idea of educational self-determination. This is not surprising. Self-determination in the field of education cannot be separated from the wider quest for social, political and economic self-determination. And full Aboriginal self-determination of this kind is not something that white politicians feel comfortable about. If further significant progress is to be made in the early education of Aborigines, however, increasing responsibility must be given to the Aboriginal people themselves. This point has been made strongly by the National Aboriginal Education Committee, a 19-member all-Aboriginal group established by the federal government as an advisory body. In a major statement of aims and objectives in Aboriginal education members of the committee make the following points:

> The contemporary education of the Aboriginal people must be a process which builds on what the Aboriginal people are by recognising and using the traditional methods of learning. Education for Aborigines should develop natural potential and not destroy our birthright.
>
> The education services offered to Aboriginal people must aim for and be capable of developing Aborigines who are at ease in the knowledge of, and pride in, their own cultural heritage as well as obtaining the academic and technological skills required of Aboriginal Australians today. To ensure effective learning we believe the latter must be acquired in harmony with the

> Aborigines' own cultural values, identity and choice of lifestyle.
>
> The NAEC believes that Aborigines are better able to understand and communicate the needs and aspirations of the Aboriginal people. This requires Aboriginal people being given responsibility for the implementation of policies, funding, and administration of programmes in Aboriginal education.
>
> In order to ensure the effectiveness of education services for Aboriginal people, Aborigines should play the major part in the delivery of those services. This requires an immediate and substantial increase in programmes, and the implementation of new programmes, to train and employ Aborigines in the field of education. (National Aboriginal Education Committee, 1978: 3–4)

These are very important recommendations indeed. If they are fully and promptly implemented by the federal government then the years ahead will be exciting ones for the field of early childhood education. Good progress has been made, but further consolidation only will be effective as the Aboriginal people themselves are allowed to assume increasing responsibility for the early education of their children.

Appendix I: An Evaluation of Pre-School Programs for Aborigines in South Australia

During 1972 and 1973 a major research study was conducted in South Australia in order to assess the effectiveness of pre-school programs for Aboriginal children. The research was carried out at Port Lincoln and Port Augusta, these two country centres being selected because special pre-school provisions had been available to Aborigines in both cities for a number of years. At Port Lincoln the children attended a Save the Children Fund Aboriginal pre-school from the age of two and a half years. The activities of this pre-school were similar to those found in conventional pre-school programs, although considerable emphasis was placed on language development. Four-year-old children were encouraged to transfer to one of the regular Kindergarten Union pre-schools for a final period of six to twelve months before entering school.

At Port Augusta a play centre had been operating for a number of years at the Umeewarra Mission. Major emphasis was given to the children's social development, and the program therefore was oriented to free play activities.

The following summary has been adapted from Teasdale and de Vries (1976).

Description of Research

The procedure adopted in both cities was to test all Aboriginal children in the first four grades (i.e. Preparatory plus Grades 1, 2 and 3) in each of the state primary schools. Additionally, at Port Lincoln, an equivalent sample of European children from lower socio-economic status backgrounds was tested. All children were assessed individually using the 10 basic sub-tests of the revised Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities (ITPA). Full details of pre-school attendance also were obtained so that each child could be allocated a rating on a 10-point scale that took into account both duration and regularity of attendance.

The test results were used to assess the effectiveness of pre-school provisions at both centres in several ways. First, it was possible to divide the Port Lincoln Aboriginal children into two groups (high and low pre-school) on the basis of the pre-school rating scale. Direct comparisons then were made between the results of the two groups using a test of statistical significance that took into account the effects of age upon performance. At Port Augusta a three-way division was made between the children: high pre-school, low pre-school, and those with no pre-schooling at all. Comparisons then were made between the latter group and high pre-school attenders at both Port Lincoln and Port Augusta.

Summary of Findings

Comparisons between the different groups suggested that Aboriginal children who attended pre-school regularly at Port Lincoln achieved at a significantly higher level in some areas than their peers who were rated as low pre-school attenders, and achieved at a very significantly higher level in most areas than Aboriginal children at Port Augusta who had had no pre-school experience at all. At least part of this superior performance must be attributed to the positive effects of regular participation in a structured pre-school program over a two-and-a-half-year period.

The free play approach of the Port Augusta pre-school had no apparent effect upon the cognitive development of the Aboriginal children, at least as measured by the sub-tests of the ITPA.

With the Port Lincoln results, statistical comparisons also were made between the European sample and the high pre-school Aborigines, and between the Europeans and the total Aboriginal group. These comparisons were made on the basis of grade level, separate analyses being made for lower (Preparatory and 1) and higher (2 and 3) grades respectively. The purpose here was to assess the performance of the Aborigines relative to that of the Europeans as they progressed through the school system. The results may be summarized as follows:

(i) The high pre-school Aboriginal children performed at a significantly higher level than their European counterparts on one ITPA sub-test (visual closure), and at lower levels on four sub-tests (auditory reception, verbal expression, manual expression and grammatic closure).

(ii) Differences between Aborigines and Europeans were relatively slight at the Preparatory and Grade 1 levels. Differences between the two groups widened very considerably, however, by the time the children reached Grades 2 and 3, with the Europeans performing at a significantly higher level on six of the ten sub-tests. The relative performance of the Aboriginal children therefore appears to have declined as they progressed through the school system.

Appendix II: The Basic Features of an Aboriginal Family Education Centre (AFEC)

In order to publicize the New South Wales project, staff prepared a small brochure to describe the basic features of an AFEC. This brochure provides a very clear outline of how the project was introduced to the Aboriginal people of New South Wales, and therefore it has been reproduced in full.

Aboriginal Family Education Centres

A Letter to Parents and Grandparents

What is AFEC?

It is a Centre that parents organise during the day for their young children. Grandparents are welcome too.

It is a Centre where children from birth to school age mix and learn, and where grown-ups meet to work and learn with the children.

It is a Centre where children can have fun with and do things with their hands and their minds.

It is a Centre where grown-ups can do things for themselves. In an AFEC you can enjoy your time with other mothers.

You can try the things you have always wanted. It is a place where you and your young children do things together.

Why have AFEC?

Once a healthy body mattered most of all. Today we need keen minds as well as strong bodies. Today education matters. Today's children need to be able to think and learn as well. Very young children are as keen as runarounds to learn. Learning is easy for the youngest ones. They have everything to learn. They reach out for learning. This is why AFEC starts children learning soon after they are born.

Before they go to school children learn from their parents. The more they learn from us the further they will go in their search for learning and the better they will do at it.

Young children need us, their fathers and mothers, to help them get started on the road to learning. They need us to spend time with them, each week. In this time we:

* Tell them what we used to do when we were children.
* Organise things for them to do with their hands and minds.
* Ask them to tell us and show us what they have done.

We have AFECs to start children asking and telling. Talking helps them learn. Children like to do things and make things. They like to be near as their parents make things.

Children meet others and learn about themselves and other people as they play. The children do things and make things as they play.

As children do things, and make things, they learn. Children learn through play.

We have AFECs so that children can play and learn.

More about AFEC

AFEC is yours. You start it and keep it going. It is your education centre, for you and your children.

In AFEC you bring your young children up the way you believe.

You and your children come once or twice a week – as often as it suits you and the children. You fix the place. You fix the days. You fix the time. You come as a family – all of you who are at home – and you go home when you and the children are ready.

At weekends and holidays the school children can join in too.

Each AFEC is a small group of families living close together. You need no more than four to six children, aged from birth to six years, to start an AFEC.

The families of these children make all their own arrangements, because AFEC belongs to the families who use it.

You can start as soon as you are ready. Once a group has more than twenty children a new group starts.

To Start an AFEC

Talk with three or four other families. If they are keen to know more, get in touch with us at the address on the front. Tell us where we can meet you. One of us will visit you – at no cost to you.

We will help you to work out:

* The best place for your group to meet.
* Whether you want a committee or a secretary.
* What to collect for the children's play.
* How to get the first session going.

One of us will, if you wish, visit you regularly, but not every time, and:

- Suggest more things for the children to do and to make.
- Suggest how you can help your children learn and the equipment you need for them.
- Help you start up your own crafts.
- Help you find out more about education, jobs, housing, citizenship.
- Arrange a small, weekly, educational grant.
- Suggest how you can raise more for yourselves as you need it.

Then one of us will work with you and show you more about

- How to run AFEC.
- How to help your children learn.
- How to get more education for yourselves and your children.

The Cost of an AFEC

AFECs receive a grant to meet the cost of buying supplies of paper, paint, flour and other materials, tools and equipment. The grant is $5 a week, just enough to help you along. You raise the rest. Because no one is well off, you keep the costs down. But together you can raise what you need – and enjoy it.

To earn this grant, parents and grandparents of the children: meet at least once a week; run a play session with the children; work with the children.

Any group of parents or grandparents, anywhere – Aborigine or non-Aborigine – can have help from the Bernard van Leer Foundation Project, Department of Adult Education, University of Sydney.

Appendix III: Main Features of the Queensland Language Development Program

The following description of the first year of the language development program has been condensed from the introduction published in the first handbook (Queensland Department of Education, 1971: xi-xxi).

Introduction

The program aims to foster the cognitive development of the children, recognizing that if satisfactory development does not take place at an early age then adequate intellectual progress is likely to be hindered.

It is essential to build upon the assets which each child has accumulated during his pre-school years, and in no way to undermine the child's concept of himself and his origin. The validity of the children's own form of communication must not be questioned. Their experiences are regarded as something of infinite worth to be used as the starting point of the program.

Four Strands

The program is designed to occupy the entire school day for the complete year. It consists of four strands which are integrated around the language units to be introduced, and involves the development of:

- oral language patterns of standard English;
- reading and writing skills;
- perceptual skills (listening, looking, touching); and
- problem solving and critical thinking.

All aspects of the school program have been incorporated into the elaboration of these strands.

Central Themes

Each strand is developed through seven blocks, each organized around a unifying theme. Themes to be introduced during the first year are: self concept; personal competence; home and family; animal families; work people do; transport and travel; and the world around us.

The basic principle which integrates all strands of the program is the expansion of the child's concept of himself. The self concept is the first theme to be introduced because the language unit 'I'm/I am' is the most frequently used pattern among five-year-old children. This linguistic unit both expresses the concept of self, and allows the generation of many extensions and refinements of that concept.

Awareness of personal competence and skills is extended with the introduction of the language unit 'I can' in the second theme.

With the introduction of the third theme the child is seen in relation to his social environment, and the self concept theme extended to include his relationships with other people, particularly his immediate family and near neighbours. A later theme includes familiar people in terms of their occupations, and the bearing they have on the child's life.

Finally, the context is extended to a wider social environment, recognizing particularly the mobility of many Aboriginal families and the important place which relatives, who often live in far-distant centres, hold in the children's lives.

Although it is suggested that each block occupy five weeks, this is to be regarded only as a guide. Time schedules may need to be adjusted to suit the needs of different groups of children or to maintain the integrated development of all strands of the program.

Oral Language

Language units introduced in the program move progressively from words and sequences common to both Aboriginal English and standard English, to those constructions not found in Aboriginal English. New vocabulary is introduced into phrase and sentence structures which have been firmly established. Each new language unit is introduced in three phases.

Listening

It is essential that children have numerous opportunities to hear a new unit in meaningful contexts before they are asked to express it themselves. Individual listening units can be used to provide such opportunities. These consist of a tape deck and headphones to be used in association with illustrated books. Children listen to the tapes which are programmed around the language unit, while they look at the pictures and accompanying captions in the book.

Listening to stories, songs and poems in which the unit occurs in refrains or key phrases is an enjoyable activity which highlights the appropriate structures. Listening materials of this type in the program can be selected on the basis of observations of the children's physical and social environment.

Supported Use

The next step is to give the children extensive practice in using the new unit. The greater the variety of situations which allow the unit to be used, the more occasions there are for its reinforcement.

Children can be encouraged to join in refrains and key phrases of stories and songs, and to repeat speech rhymes incorporating the unit. Individual retelling of stories by the children and dramatization of the stories enable further practice. Games which call for responses using the unit can be played.

At this stage, emphasis is placed on rhythmic patterns of units. Rhythmic movement and percussion accompaniment to the repetition of sentences containing the language unit are important. Instruments such as click sticks, bongo drums and shakers are useful.

As an aid to the association of the oral and written form of the unit, printed language cards are used. Magnetic tape is affixed to the back of the cards so they will adhere to a metal board. The children build up the unit using the cards, and practice is given in 'reading' it rhythmically. Frequent opportunities for the association of the oral and written forms of language units develop an appreciation of writing and reading as forms of communication.

Unsupported Use

By this stage the children are expected to use the new unit spontaneously in their comment and discussion. Unaided manipulation of the printed cards in activities with the magnetic board is also expected.

Reading and Writing

An important aim of the program is to establish competence in the secondary language skills of reading and writing, which are basic to achievement in all areas of the curriculum. It is essential that, in acquiring these skills, the children participate in enjoyable activities which are intrinsically interesting and rewarding.

It is equally important that the children develop an understanding of the way in which books communicate ideas. Accordingly, it is desirable that much of the early reading material be selected from the oral language which the children use in discussion activities. The teacher can listen for use of standard English patterns, which can then be written down and read immediately.

Printed Language Units

The language units introduced in the program form the basis of the children's sight vocabulary. When the children are familiar with the oral use of the language units, printed forms are introduced. They are encouraged to combine these into language sequences, and read them aloud. Oral and visual forms of sentence structures are thus experienced simultaneously. Using the units in this way enables the children to construct their own sentences without having to wait until they have mastered the motor skills involved in writing.

Experience Reading

It is basic that the early reading material be interesting and relevant to the children. One way of ensuring this is to record events from their experience. Each day, items of news contributed by the children can be written down by the teacher and 'read' by the group.

The children may dictate labels for objects and pictures in the classroom. Wherever possible, sequences of words are preferable to single words. For example, 'It's a dog' rather than 'dog' helps to reinforce the language units of the program.

Every opportunity for involving the families in the children's progress should be taken. Children are encouraged to take home captioned drawings and printed cards which they can 'read' to others.

Practice Reading

A variety of additional material is desirable. Language booklets depicting Aboriginal people in environments familiar to the children have been devised, and the children should be encouraged to 'read' these. The captioned books used with the listening unit also give practice in reading the units of the program. Some of the material should be read rhythmically to assist in developing awareness of appropriate stress and intonation patterns.

Writing

Pre-writing activities to develop the motor skills and fine coordination necessary for writing are included in many sections of the program. However, even in the early weeks, writing activities extend beyond manipulation of pencil and crayon.

A more important aspect of writing is the conveying of meaning. Tracing or copying of sentences is therefore introduced early. Furthermore, handling printed units develops a sense of ordering from left to right, and facilitates the placing of words in their correct position in the language sequence.

Perceptual Skills

Perceptual skills depend upon discrimination between sensory impressions received from the outside world. Such discrimination is necessary if children are to interpret sensations adequately.

The program aims to enrich the children's perceptual experience by providing an increasingly varied assortment of sounds, sights and textures. The children should be encouraged to name and classify these.

When fine discriminations are not practised, it is easy to fall into lazy habits of listening, looking and touching. The program introduces discriminations, beginning with gross differences and progressing to fine differences.

Classroom facilities are supplemented by records, tapes, books, pictures and film strips. Special technical aids will be used to help focus the children's attention, and to increase motivation.

Auditory Skills

The perception of meaningful speech depends on the ability to discriminate between and integrate sounds which are heard. Since Aboriginal English does not discriminate between some vowel sounds of standard English, and omits and substitutes some consonantal sounds and blends, it is essential that the children be given extensive training in recognizing similarities and differences between sounds, both non-vocal and vocal.

The use of alliteratively named puppets, e.g., Susie Seasnake, is a valuable aid in increasing awareness of the language sounds which are used either rarely or inappropriately. The puppet characters are interesting to the children, who readily become involved in phonic activities built around them.

Visual Skills

Reading depends partly upon the ability to discriminate between letter and word forms, and partly upon the ability to integrate these into meaningful word and phrase sequences. The considerable visual skills displayed by Aboriginal children provide a basis for the expansion of many of the abilities which underlie success in learning to read.

Many materials which can be manipulated by the children aid in the development of these abilities. Projected images have novelty value for all children, and use is made of this to increase motivation and maintain the children's interest. Photographs and filmstrips of the children and their environment promote discussion which assists in elaborating the self concept through direct identification.

Other visual material is projected using exposure times reduced by a tachistoscopic shutter. The basic aim is the recognition of shapes at speeds considerably more rapid than those usually required for the assimilation of visual images. The novelty and intrinsic appeal of the activity encourages children to attend. The rapid decisions required to achieve successful recognition assist in perceptual development.

Recognition and recall are tested by asking the children to match the projected image with the appropriate shape from their individual sets of cards. Discrimination is developed by increasing the similarity of the choices available. The task becomes more difficult as the items to be recognized progress from familiar animal shapes to letter-like figures.

Once the children have become familiar with matching individual shapes, sequences are introduced to develop visual memory. Correct ordering of the images perceived and remembered is an important prerequisite to success in reading and writing.

When the children are familiar with printed language units, word slides are introduced. Initially, untimed exposures are used, and the children either match the projection with language cards or respond vocally. Progression to reduced speeds is achieved following greater familiarity with the units.

Sequences of slides are then used, and the children match the projected units with language cards to build up sentences. The complete sentence may then be read by the children.

Problem Solving and Critical Thinking

In building upon concepts which the children have already established, the program aims to develop strategies and conceptual skills for problem solving and critical thinking.

A close link is maintained between the perceptual training and discovery strands of the program. Discrimination of similarities and differences between objects draws the children's attention to their salient characteristics, and leads to the establishment of classificatory concepts. Matching and sorting activities, picture discrepancies, and oddity problems encourage classification into categories. Finding things which belong together or are used in particular situations assists in expanding associative networks between concepts.

Observation of changes, for example, a child grows, ice melts, a cake is cut into pieces, can assist in the development of conversation concepts.

The vital association and integration of different concepts necessary for later problem solving can be achieved through the use of activities which illustrate more than one concept. For example, an activity listed as seriation, in which the children in the group are ordered by height, also aids in the development of the self-concept (the child sees who is taller and who is shorter than himself) and classification concepts (tall children, short children). The concurrent provision by the teacher of appropriate oral language units expands both the children's conceptual structures and the time available for verbal expression.

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This book is concerned with a description and an analysis of six innovative programs of early childhood education for Aboriginal Australian children. It is an important account which should be read with care — and perhaps in some cases with concern — by politicians and administrators interested in, and responsible for, the education of Aboriginal people as well as by professionals in this field.

The story of the programs is an exciting and a sobering one. It is exciting because, as can be seen even from the limited evaluative data, each of the efforts was successful in its own way. 'Placed together', Teasdale and Whitelaw claim, 'it is clear that they have played a very dominant role in shaping the direction of early childhood education provision for Aboriginal Australians since 1967'.

The story is sobering because, in the short run at least, the lessons of the programs have not been well learned, other than in the narrow context of the communities in which they operated.

The book demonstrates the need for, and the positive consequences of, good programs. It is to be hoped that the book will stimulate interest and action at all levels of responsibility.

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